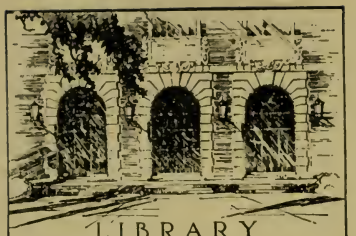

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Into the solemn wood,
Solemn and silent everywhere
Nature with folded hands seemed there,
Kneeling at her evening prayer,
Like one in prayer I stood."

VOL. III.

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WILD WOOD.

CHAPTER I.

May attempted no remonstrance, but went up and saw after things for the night. Durill kept his word; a little before twelve he came in, arrayed in dressing gown and slippers, and sat down opposite May by the fire. The time wore on, and they talked in whispers for fear of waking Evelyn, who slept but fitfully. Sometimes May would give her a drink, and turn the pillow; then she would doze again. A few minutes before three she got wide awake, and May lifted her up and gave her some jelly. The little thing smiled at them both, and played for a second with Durill's chain and seal; then, turn-

ing to May she said, "Evelyn so seepy, Aunty May;" and, almost before May could put her down, she was in a fast sleep. This deep sleep lasted, and Durill and May watching saw that a change had passed over the beautiful little face. The look of sickness had gone; she just seemed a healthy child enjoying a refreshing sleep. The chesnut curls lay over the pillow, and one dimpled little hand was thrust outside the bed-clothes. May wondered if this could be a change for the better, and, then glancing at Durill, saw that he was dozing. She felt very tired; for she had been up the best part of two nights, so she leant back and closed her eyes. She was not asleep, but a mist seemed to rise before her, and a buzz, like the sound of bees in a garden on a summer's day, fell upon her ear. Out of the mist and the buzz of the bees came a call—"Aunty May! Aunty May!"

May and Durill started up simultaneously and went to the bed.

Two little arms were stretched out, and a flood of light poured down on the golden head. Little Evelyn was sitting up, trying to reach them with a joyful smile on her innocent face.

May put her arms round the wee white figure. "Evelyn, my darling!"

There was a little panting, a little fluttering as the child's soul fought against the prison bars that held it. Ah! it is free now, and little Evelyn is dead.

May laid her gently down on the pillows. Yes, there had been a call while May dozed. The angels had come for Evelyn, and she had called Aunty May as she was going away. Durill, the big man, was crying. May felt very rich and happy—her darling was in Heaven by now. She imagined just how it would be. Two bright angels flying back to Heaven with Evelyn in their arms, and the child looking back, smiling, and calling for Aunty May, saying good bye to her. Then they would reach the "golden gate"

and pass in, and to the assembled host the two angels would lead Evelyn Drever, and there would be great rejoicing, and Evelyn would go and play with the other child angels. And May wondered whether the sound of bees she had heard had not been the rush of the angels' wings as they came flying for Evelyn.

May thought this while looking at the lovely piece of marble on the bed over which the hue of death had spread; on whose pure brow the King had set His seal.

"What o'clock is it, I wonder?" said Durill, presently.

May pulled the blind aside; daylight was just breaking. Streaks of light, like threads of silver, were stretched across the black heavens; all meeting at one spot in the east. That light spot seemed just the place where Evelyn was.

"It is after four, I should say, Durill; has your watch stopped?"

"Yes, May, my darling;" and he took her in

his arms. "Are you going to grieve after our pet."

"No, Durill," answered May, the tears rolling down her still white face. "The Lord can do better for her than I could, and she is not far away from me. Yet she was very dear to me with her winning ways and sunny face."

"King Hop did not come without cause, May; but I did not think the baby would go first."

"I daresay not; but God loves little children, and we are told that—

> "'There is no flock, however watched and tended,
> But one dead lamb is there.
> There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
> But has one vacant chair.'

And"—

"Stop May, love, while I ask you something; do you think that things go on in heaven that there is such a thing as time?"

"I know what has made you think of that,

Durill, because in the piece I have just quoted from it goes on to say—

> " 'Not as a child shall we again behold her;
> For when with raptures wild,
> In our embraces, we again enfold her,
> She will not be a child;
> But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,
> Clothed with celestial grace;
> And beautiful, with all the soul's expansion,
> Shall we behold her face.'

"I don't think that is right, Durill; I believe they remain just as they die. I don't know how we shall recognise each other if years are to go on. Besides we are told there is no age, no decay. No, I expect God will give them back to us just as He takes them, excepting those who had any impurity or died of some disease, they will be made perfect and beautiful. But I am contented to leave it to Him, only I may say that I had rather meet Evelyn just as she lies on that bed; just as I have known her; just as the angels came for her—a little child."

They turned from the window, and May went

to arouse Parker and some of the maids. You could scarcely tell when the business of the day had begun; there was such a stillness everywhere. Poor little Ivo sobbed as if his heart would break when he knew he would never play with his little sister again; and May cried with him, talked to and comforted him, and hushed him in her arms. And, when he was calm and his passionate grief all spent, she took him to see that little sister who looked so like a wax doll. She looked just as she did every night when asleep, for they had not cut her hair. She was smiling—and the pretty dimples in the rounded cheeks showed distinctly. The fat, chubby hands, were crossed on her breast; and, between the short fingers, someone had placed a little bunch of snowdrops and white narcissus, and at her feet another bunch.

May lifted Ivo up to kiss the little angel, and, as they were leaving the room, there began a sweet, plaintive song. May turned—there at the

window was a little robin perched on a bough of the old oak that faced the windows of both day and night nursery. He was quite close to the glass, looking in and singing his mournful song. It sounded so pitiful.

"That is Evelyn's robin, Aunt May," whispered Ivo; "he is hungry, and she always fed him every morning."

May looked from the dead child to the robin. Poor little fellow—and he has lost his mistress.

"Should you like him for your robin, Ivo? I know Evelyn would like it."

"Oh! yes, Aunt May, so much."

"Very well, my dear; then he is your robin. Come into the day nursery, and we will open the window and feed him as usual."

And that was how Evelyn's robin became Ivo's.

On the Monday little Evelyn was consigned to the family vault with all the Drevers for generations back. Gilbert was ill, and could not come

down, so she was taken by her grandfather and uncles, Judy, Ivo, and May. They stooped to take a farewell look of all that remained of one who, in her brief sojourn at Wild Wood, had grown so dear to them. On the pretty coffin was a silver plate, and engraved on it—

"EVELYN DREVER,
Aged Three Years."
"He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom."

And Evelyn was, indeed, one of the Lord's lambs—pure and spotless, white as snow!

A short time after little Evelyn's death, the family were all assembled at breakfast with the exception of Julius. He was late for a wonder, and when he entered the room the first thing he did was to apologise, the next to inquire if there were any letters.

"No, there are none," replied Judy, who sat next him.

"A good job; I only hope they will let me finish my holiday in peace and comfort."

"When must you leave us, Julius?" asked the Squire.

"The end of this week, I believe, sir; sorry am I to say it."

Ivo had been waiting patiently till he could speak; he came to breakfast now, indeed, every meal, excepting dinner, because it was so lonely for him, and he sat between May and Durill. There was now a pause in the conversation, and Ivo exclaimed—

"There is a letter for you, Uncle Julius, and I put it under your plate; it is such a funny letter."

Julius laughed; he had grown very fond of Ivo, and they got on capitally, which May was delighted to see. She intended Ivo to go to Julius.

"You little monkey!" said Julius, turning over the plate.

Yes, there was a letter, and Ivo was correct—it was queer. Julius held it up in astonishment, and ejaculated—

"Bless me!"

"What is it, Julius?" asked May.

Before Julius could answer there was a sudden crash at the top of the table. Crispin had dropped his cup of hot coffee, and it had run over the cloth.

"How ever did you do that, Crispin?" said Madam. "Lois, darling, ring the bell."

Crispin was perfectly white; and he stammered out—

"My hands are so cold—the cup slipped."

"Poor Crispin," replied Madam, tenderly.

The performance of Crispin's seemed to have turned the current of the conversation; and when tranquillity was restored no one mentioned the letter.

"Ivo," said May, as they rose from the table, "I will excuse your lessons to-day; it is so nice and bright; you are better playing, and I have many things to attend to."

"Thank you, Aunty May," and Ivo commenced capering round.

"Ivo," called Judy, "I am going out; you can come with me if you choose."

So it was arranged, and May and Durill betook themselves to their den. Hardly were they in, before Julius entered, looking extremely mysterious.

"What now, Lawyer?" said Durill.

"The same as before; another of those confounded epistles from Moses—listen to this—

"You sit me at defiance; you take no heede of my worning—so I will acte.

"MOSES."

"I wonder who the devil Moses is? No relation of mine, I'll swear; if he had signed himself Adam I could have understood it better, because, I suppose, we are all related to him."

Julius sat down on the table, on the top of the

yearly report and subscription list of the "Slappton Hounds," of which Duril was master. May spoke first.

"I cannot imagine what Moses is going to do, Julius."

"No more can I, May; but I think I will get the matter sifted, and turn the tables on Mr. Moses when I get back to town, and in working order."

"By the way, Julius, shall you see what ails Gilbert that he could not come down to little Evelyn's funeral."

"I don't know that I shall take the trouble, Durill. He is most probably keeping out of the way of his creditors, and no more ill than you are."

"That's just what May thinks."

"Yes, it is, Julius," replied May. "Shall I take care of this letter for you, I have the first one?"

"Yes, you may as well," and he tossed it over the table to her.

When dinner-time came Crispin was absent, and Lois informed the company that Crispin had gone to dine with the Andertons.

"Why, I saw Crispin racing over the fields to the station when I was out with Ivo this morning," exclaimed Judy, looking at Lois.

Lois turned scarlet, and replied, pettishly—

"You must be mistaken, Judy. Crispin has gone to the Rectory, I tell you."

No one ventured to contradict this statement; in fact, no one was in a position to, seeing they knew nothing about it.

But about half-past ten May was crossing the hall, and encountered Crispin, wrapped in a great coat, coming in. He evidently did not want her to see him, but May stopped and kindly hoped he had spent a pleasant evening, and asked after the Andertons.

His face flushed angrily, and he roughly told her to mind her own business, and walked upstairs to his room.

May's face was crimson, for there stood one of the footmen, who had let Crispin in. Brief though the interview had been, it had enabled May to see that Crispin was not in evening dress. While she was thus standing partly in amazement and partly in indignation, the drawing-room door opened, and out came Julius, the perfect gentleman.

"What's the matter, Lady May?"

"Nothing much, Julius," replied May, wisely keeping her own counsel, and he asked no more, but talked nonsense to her for some time, till the cloud called forth by Crispin's ungentlemanly behaviour was quite dispelled, and the others pouring out of the room, found May and Julius in fits of laughter on the stairs.

At the end of the week Julius went back to the Temple. He told Durill and May that he should wait and see what Moses did before he bothered about it. He would have plenty to do after his holiday, and the Jew must keep. It was

really the best plan as nothing could be understood from the mysterious epistles, and Julius had nothing to dread.

His departure cast quite a blank on all, for a short time, and even May and Durill felt it.

"'Pon my word, Judy is right, May," exclaimed Durill, on the Saturday morning, as they were busy at work. "No one can fill Julius's place."

And no wonder, what with his serio-comic face, ready wit and sense, good nature and good looks, Julius Drever's place was no easy one to fill.

"Yes, we do miss Julius, like dear little Evelyn," answered May, rather sadly.

"I can't bear to see gaps," said Durill, leaning his head on his hands. "I shall ask Hardwick to dinner to-night, eh, May?"

"Yes, do; I shall like to see him."

"Well, I will; but I hope to goodness no one will commence chattering about George, the poor

fellow can't stand it. I wonder if he will ever get accustomed to his loss? I wonder if we shall ever cease to want that little dumpling of a child? I don't believe I shall ever get used to it. I have caught myself looking for her two or three times, and I feel sometimes as if I would give anything to have her warm plump little body in my arms, and her cheek against mine."

May glanced up; the Master of the Hounds had his large brown eyes full of tears. May's eyes filled too.

"You did love that baby, Durill."

"Aye, that I did, and she loved me, dear little thing. May, I hope, like you, that God will keep her just the same—a little baby with a golden head—till I go up there."

It did seem strange to hear a huge fellow of thirty-two talking about Heaven and a little child. But it was very nice; it seemed to bring Heaven very close. Durill seemed to have something more to say, so May smiled, and he jerked out—

"May, do you think there is to be another loss?"

"How can I tell? I trust not, but who knows? We had better leave it in a mist at present; if it is to come, it will come all too soon," sighed May.

CHAPTER II.

About this time Mrs. Calvert fell sick, that is to say she had one of her attacks, poor old lady—though she did not consider herself old by any means. Kate and Ruby bore all patiently; the life seemed knocked out of them both, and Mrs. Calvert, after scolding them till she coughed nearly to choking, informed them "You both look very dismal." Ruby crossed her hands meekly on her lap, and looked at Kate. Now Kate loved her sister dearly, Ruby was all she had now, for Mark had a wife (and what brother is worth much after saying "I thee take Sophia, Frances, etc.," as the case may be), and George was dead. Kate had noticed a change in little Ruby, and guessed that she had some trouble, and did not need any scolding to fill her cup of bitter-

ness. But they did not confide their sorrows to each other, these sisters. They were sitting in the drawing-room after tea, and Mrs. Calvert was reading the paper. It was quite a relief to see the endless red knitting laid aside. They knew she had found some horror, because she was reading with her mouth slightly open, and perfectly quiet. Suddenly she ejaculated—

"Well, of all the dreadful things, really no one's safe, now-a-days; I don't know what the world is coming to. What would your dear papa say if he were here?"

"What is it, mamma?" inquired Kate.

"Why a whole train killed — every one smashed to atoms, and cut up in bits, not a leg left. And I don't doubt but what the poor things' pockets would be picked by those grasping porters. Recollect, girls, I always travel with my purse pinned in my stays, so if anything happens to *me* you'll know where to find it."

Mrs. Calvert leant back in her chair, quite

impressed with her own importance, and rather overcome at the thought of the dismal and heart-rending spectacle she was destined some day to present to an awe-struck crowd, extended on her back along some embankment.

"But you are not going any journey, are you, mamma?" asked Ruby, hoping she was.

"Don't be inquisitive, Ruby, I may do; I think of going to 'The Hall.'"

There was a dead silence after this overpowering intelligence.

"Kate, I saw the brother to that poor wicked young man with the big eyes, this afternoon. He was talking to Spink, whose round of beef I am going to have this week. I hope it will eat tender: I thought of that when I saw him."

Kate bent over Theo and pulled his ear—she knew who her mother meant by the "wicked young man with the big eyes." She seemed to derive comfort from Theo's silken ears, for she went on pulling them and wondering how many

times George had pulled them, only perhaps not so gently.

Theo gave a whine and jumped up; he was very fond of Kate, and his brute instinct told him something was wrong by the look of her face. Mrs. Calvert immediately threw up her hands, exclaiming—

"Bless us all, now I told you how it would be Kate, having two dogs in the house, he is going to fight my Toby. Get away, sir, you little monster, if you dare; come here, my poor Toby."

Ruby laughed.

"They are not going to fight, mamma. Old Toby is too great a coward."

"Silence! Ruby; I won't hear a word against Toby; he is getting old like I am, and it is very unbecoming in you, Ruby, to disparage old age; it is a direct insult to me, your mother, and I take it as such."

Mrs. Calvert was in a temper; she was offended,

and at nothing. Ruby sighed, got up, and left the room. It was hard that they must sit still like children, and listen to her stupid rambling. They could not hold an interesting or sensible conversation, because she could not have been amused. And as for telling an anecdote, it was out of the question, for Mrs. Calvert required it explained so much that all the edge got rubbed off it. Kate soon followed Ruby, whom she found kneeling before the dining-room fire. It was low, for Mrs. Calvert practised economy, one result of which was always visible to the eyes of anyone in the dining-room. On the mantel-piece was a clock, and on the top of it a dog with a brace of birds in his mouth. It was very well executed, and its proper colour was bronze, but now, alas! it was anything you liked to call it. During one of Mrs. Calvert's fits of economy she got a girl to take the place of one of the servants, and this young savage being turned at large in the dining-room one morning, employed

her time blackleading the bronze dog. Mrs. Calvert's state of mind upon beholding the precious dog is better imagined than described.

"Well, Kate," said Ruby, glancing up.

"Never mind, child," answered Kate, kindly putting her hand on Ruby's pretty head.

"I don't care one bit, my dear Kate; it is always the same, and always will be, I suppose. I have got past caring now."

They talked in low tones for some time, and then the tray came in, and after a while they had to go to bed. How happy Mrs. Calvert made her children.

The cold and frost continued with unabated intensity for several weeks. It was, indeed, a long hard winter. Julius had been gone now a little better than a fortnight. There had been one long letter to Durill and May, in which he told them he had heard nothing further of Moses. But not so of Gilbert. That gentleman's effects had been seized for debt, and they

were now in lodgings, which pleased his indolent wife vastly better. He had gone to Julius to try and get help from him, but Julius would not be implicated, "but made him a present of ten pounds. The last he will ever get from me. It is a blessing we have the little lad."

Durill and May were talking over this epistle when Judy came in. It was almost dark, and "just the time to chatter" as school girls say.

"Sit down Judy, and let's try and keep warm."

"No, thank you, Durill; I can't stay. Durill, I want you to help me?"

"Very glad to, I am sure, my dear, if I can; what is it?"

Judy remained standing, holding by the table.

"I want some money, Durill."

"You have run through your last quarter's, I suppose, and the other is not due?"

"Yes, that is it, Durill; but I want you to lend me some. I want a hundred pounds."

Durill and May were speechless for a second.

"Judy, the demand is exorbitant," said May.

"Yes, it is; but Durill don't refuse me; I earnestly intreat you to lend me that money."

Durill got up, and stood with his back to the fire.

"Judy, I cannot grant your request; I have not a hundred pounds at liberty, and shall not have for several months—not till the end of March. My business is such that I cannot be without capital; and just now it is all out, with the exception of a little, which nothing short of a matter of life and death would prevail upon me to touch. It cannot be anything urgent with you, therefore I must refuse you."

Without another word, Judy left the room.

"Durill, I wish you could have lent Judy the money."

"So do I, May; but it is impossible just now; if all goes well, I shall have made a fortune by the end of March; but I must wait and see how that venture turns out."

"Judy must have been very extravagant this last year."

"Yes, she must, May, for her allowance is ample. You have the least, and you ought to have the most. I wonder what Judy and Lois will do if they don't get married?"

"They'll have enough to live on, I suppose."

"Yes, they will have sufficient to live quietly on, but no more. 'Mill Bank' is Judy's, and, I presume, the Squire intends those who don't marry to live there with her.'"

"We must manage somehow, I suppose; that is the way with a large family—all cannot have fortunes."

"You seem very cheerful about it, May dear. Never fear, I shall take care of you and Ivo. You must live with me if the change comes before you marry."

"I don't know that I would do that. No, I shall manage, and Julius will take Ivo when he is educated."

Captain Hardwick soon became a constant visitor at Wild Wood, and Madam thought it was, of course, on account of dear Lois. But she was not quite sure that Lois might not do better, though he was heir to a baronetcy. His uncle might not die for long, and meanwhile Lois would only be Mrs. Hardwick; Lois seemed rather disposed to favour the good-looking officer. Charles Blackett had taken himself off, and his marriage with Margaret Hopwood was to take place shortly. So Lois made a dead set at Godwin Hardwick. He liked, however, talking to quiet May, and told her a deal about "poor George."

May quite understood him, and they chattered about Evelyn and George between them, just as if they were in life. In the middle of one of these conversations, with Durill sitting by rather wonderingly, something unusual occurred. It was a few minutes after half-past eight, and Blake had just brought the tray in, and set it

down on one of the tables; Lois was moving gracefully; they were all in slight mourning for Evelyn.

"Judy, will you make tea," called Madam.

Judy put down her work and took her place at the table. Crispin came for Madam's cup, and was admiring himself in a glass as he walked across the room, when suddenly his steps and everyone else's attention were arrested by loud cries, which, as they came nearer, developed into—"Aunt May! Aunt May!"

There was a rush to the door, the first to reach it being May, Durill, and Captain Hardwick. The sight that met their eyes was Ivo flying down the hall in his nightgown, terror imprinted on his face. He bounded straight into May's arms, which were held open to him, and, clasping her tightly round the neck, commenced to sob violently. Consternation prevailed; no one could understand it; the servants poured in, and the hall was filled with wondering

faces. The poor child could say nothing, he was nearly terrified out of his senses.

"What is all this," asked the Squire, sternly; "who has been frightening the child?"

"No one had."

"And where is his nurse?"

"Here, sir," answered Parker, coming to the front with a face as white as a sheet. The girl trembled violently, and could hardly speak. Everyone eyed her in astonishment.

"What is to do with you, pray?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing, sir, only I am so frightened, please, sir;" and the girl set to work to cry bitterly.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Squire, "this is most extraordinary. Clear the hall, Blake, it is no use attempting to get a sensible answer at present."

The Squire was correct, for from crying, Parker went into hysterics, and was carried screaming out. Little Ivo clung fast to May,

and gradually became calmer. One of the maids had, at May's request, brought her a big shawl, and in this the boy was enveloped.

"Bring him here, May," said the Squire, motioning the drawing-room; and May had no alternative but to obey.

They gave him some hot tea, and when he was quite reassured and happy, the Squire told May to find out what had startled him. The child was obedient and good, he made no fuss now his terror was past, but said at once that it was "a man with a black thing over his face." There was a low murmur at this, and Lois drew nearer to Captain Hardwick, which flattering preference was lost upon him, he having only one pair of eyes, and those being engaged looking at May and the lovely boy on her lap.

"And where did you see this man, my dear?"

"At my bedside, grandpapa; and I was so frightened, I jumped out of bed and ran down here."

"And where did the man go to, Ivo?"

"I think he went into the day nursery, grandpapa."

Now this was possible, as there was a door through, as well as a door to each room.

"There, don't cry, my little man," said the Squire, kindly kissing him, for Ivo looked ready to. "The man sha'n't touch you, or anyone else; you are grandpapa's little boy."

"And Aunt May's too?" asked Ivo, looking up.

"Yes, and Aunt May's, too."

"Durill," said the Squire, aside, "just take a look over the house with some of the men. I believe the little lad's been dreaming, but, nevertheless, it is no harm to look; eh, Hardwick?"

"None at all, sir; I should certainly look, that little chap is too intelligent to be easily frightened."

Durill and Captain Hardwick, accompanied by

Blake with a lamp, proceeded to search the entire establishment. Blake at once went to the side-door, and found it open.

"This door open after all me and Mrs. Morrison have said. See, Mr. Durill, sir, Master Ivo may be right, for anyone could sneak in here, and up the stairs, and not one of us be a bit the wiser."

"Yes, you are right, Blake; we must stop coming in at this door after dark, or have a latch put on. But it is handy, just across the court-yard."

"Yes, it is, sir; but one night, when there was a party on, and ever so much of the silver about, I found it open, and I could not rest till all had been counted. It just seems like a warning, that it does."

The old man was indefatigable; he poked the lamp everywhere, and Durill and Captain Hardwick were just as bad. But nothing was to be seen. Several of the windows were unfastened, for which the housemaids would catch it when

old Blake got down-stairs. But all was right, and Blake heaved a sigh of profound relief as the last closet was searched. Durill and Captain Hardwick were at the bottom of the stairs when they met Crispin.

"Well, is all right, or have you had a great encounter?"

"Yes, we have had an awful tussel, and come off without a scratch," answered Captain Hardwick.

Crispin went up three steps at a time, laughing. They entered the drawing-room, and pronounced all safe. May was standing with Ivo still in her arms.

"Where are you going, May, love?" asked Durill.

"To put Ivo to bed; he is sleepy."

"I am going to sleep with Aunty May," announced Ivo, lifting his pretty head off her shoulder, "and I sha'n't be frightened any more."

"That's a brave little man!" said Captain Hardwick, smiling at the child.

"Don't stay long, May," called Judy, as she was leaving the room.

"You don't like being without Miss May, Miss Drever."

"No, indeed, Captain Hardwick; the room is never the same without her, ask papa."

"Eh? What's that? Be without May!" exclaimed the Squire, raising his white head. "I could not part with May, my last born; she is dearer to me than all the rest. No, we will not part, till God parts us!"

This was said very solemnly. It was the first time the Squire had ever spoken so openly and plainly of his strong love for May before his family. And Durill looked rather critically at him; he did not like to hear him mention that last parting, it seemed like the first step on the road indicated by "King Hop." Captain Hardwick sighed, and pulled his beard. Lois had heard the conversation, and she had been watching the Captain's face.

She detected a deeper meaning in his tone and face than the question implied.

Meanwhile May continued her way to her room, and put Ivo into her bed. The little fellow was almost asleep, and could scarcely return May's fond embrace. After tucking him up, May went into the day-nursery. There was Parker, picking up the contents of her work-basket. At the sound of May's voice she started violently.

"Are you better, Parker?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss May," replied the girl, keeping her eyes down, and turning everything out of its place in the basket in her confusion.

May regarded her in astonishment, it was so unlike Parker.

"What is to do with you, Parker? Did *you* see Master Ivo's startling apparition?"

"Me, miss? Oh! no, indeed."

Her face, white before, had now grown ghastly.

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"I am upset, Miss May, and not well, and Master Ivo gave me such a turn."

May smiled. This nightmare of Ivo's had been a fright for her as well as Parker. May dreaded that it would turn out to be a second edition of "King Hop," and she could scarcely question the child when requested to by the Squire. The man with a black thing over his face was nothing to May.

"I should advise you to go to bed; I don't believe Master Ivo will awake."

"Thank you, Miss May; but I would rather stay here a little, if you please, in case he should be frightened."

There was one peculiarity about Parker, and that was her liking for the Drever family, but especially for May and the children. It amounted almost to worship; she would have risked her life to have saved May. It was no cant, nor did she speak of it, but it seemed the whole business of the girl's life to serve May faithfully.

"Very well, Parker; stay if you like," and wishing her good night, May left the room.

There was some little amusement going on when May entered the drawing-room, at the expense of that luckless Tommy Chuckels. Some of his absurdities had leaked out, and the scene at Ted Archer's dinner-party rose to the minds of Durill and Captain Hardwick, while Crispin, who was a capital mimic, took Tommy off to perfection.

The Squire and May laughed heartily, though she had heard it all before. Durill rolled about in his chair in agony at the recollection, and Godwin Hardwick laughed till he cried. Then, turning to May, he said—

"How poor George enjoyed that scene; I thought he must have gone into a fit, the way he laughed over it!"

And neither of them spoke for a second, for they recollected that George, with all his faults and drolleries, was lost to them for ever in this world.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW nights after Ivo's fright, May was sitting warming her toes by the snuggery fire; it was between dinner and tea, and of late these few moments had been given to Ponto, because there was only one little child to hear say its prayers now. Ponto was looking so lazy on May's knee, thoroughly enjoying his few minutes' patting.

"Come in," said May, in answer to a rap at the door.

Parker entered.

"Please, Miss May, can I go to the village for an hour? Master Ivo is asleep."

"Yes, you can, Parker. I am glad you are going, because I want that mixture made again; my cough is rather trying."

"Yes, I heard you, Miss May," replied Parker, in a serious tone.

May laughed.

"I am quite well, Parker, though I have not much colour. But I can't find the key of this cupboard, and I put the prescription in here along with a lot more papers."

"I daresay Mr. Durill has it, ma'am," suggested the watchful girl, anxious to spare May the trouble of so much searching.

"No doubt he has; just run and ask him, will you, Parker? He went to see Jenkinson about something."

The girl went out by the side-door, and May took up her place before the fire, and set about consoling Ponto, who considered himself ill-used by being pushed off her lap while the hunt for the key went on. May's cough was nothing serious, only rather annoying when she lay down, so Mark had given her some simple remedy. But she did not take any care of herself, she was

too much engaged caring for others. Presently the girl returned.

"I can't find Mr. Durill, Miss May; but I saw Mr. Crispin, and asked him, but he never answered me."

"I suppose he did not know, Parker. But no doubt Mr. Durill is in his room; I will go and see. You had better come and get ready, and then you won't lose time."

Half way up the stairs they met Crispin coming down, looking the pink of neatness with a pair of delicate gloves half on. May regarded him in astonishment; one minute in the court-yard, the next coming from his room arrayed for a party.

"You seem amazed, May," said he, laughing, and showing his white even teeth.

"I am, rather, Crispin, and at your quickness. You have not been long dressing to-night."

"Indeed! but I have, it is so mortal cold. I could hardly fasten my tie; does it look all right?"

"Yes, very nice. But, Crispin, you were in the court-yard just now, for Parker spoke to you when I sent her to find Durill."

It was now Crispin's turn to look amazed.

"You have been dreaming, Parker."

"No, indeed, Mr. Crispin; I spoke to you, sir, asked you, 'Please, sir, do you know where Mr. Durill is?' You were standing close to the wall."

The girl looked Crispin respectfully, but quite determinedly in the face, as much as to say, "You know you were there," and May gazed in perplexity at first one and then the other.

"But you are mistaken, Parker, because I have never been out since dinner, I have been half-an-hour dressing if I have been a second, and when I left Madam in the drawing-room I came straight up with Lois."

Parker's face got perfectly white, and the same terrified look was upon it that she wore the night Ivo had the nightmare.

"Mr. Crispin, sir, if this was my last moment, I should still say that I saw you standing against the wall near the gates. I saw your face distinctly; the moon was upon it, and you had your arms folded across your chest. If it was not you it was your —"

"My what, Parker?"

"Ghost, sir."

And the girl commenced to shiver violently. Crispin laughed merrily.

"What did I say in answer to your question? Perhaps I have taken to walking in my sleep before going to bed."

"You did not answer me, sir, and I did not like to ask again."

"Then it must have been my ghost, Parker; but you are trembling like a leaf. I did not know you were frightened of me before."

A tinge of red came into the girl's white face, and she turned to him almost savagely, with a regular flash in her grey eyes.

"I am not afraid of you, sir. I will go and get ready, Miss May."

"Yes, Parker, do so."

In the corridor just above them stood Durill.

"What's the matter?" asked he, coming down.

Crispin was laughing.

"Have you been kissing Parker, Crispin?" asked Durill, smiling.

"Good gracious, no; no harm if I do, though, she is a nice little girl. May will tell you about it; I cannot stay."

"Where are you going to?" enquired May.

"The Hopwoods. I wonder if Lois is ready?"

"Ah! I thought it was to-morrow night. Here's Lois now. Is Judy going?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Lois, drawing her opera cloak round her. "Is the carriage round, Cris?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," said that gentleman, running down.

Lois called to May to hurry Judy.

"Yes, I'll go. Stay, Durill; have you got the key of that left cupboard in the snuggery?"

"Yes, I have, dear," and inserting a finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, he produced the said key. What's wanted?"

"Nothing; only a prescription. Where are you going to?"

"The snuggery till tea, and I want you."

May nodded, and ran up stairs to Judy's rooms.

"Are you ready? The others are down, and the carriage is round I expect."

"Yes, I am ready. Will you shake my skirts up, May? I detest thin dresses, but one can't go to these parties in anything else, unfortunately."

"Never mind, you look very nice, dear. If Kate and Ruby are there ask Ruby to come up; her foot must be strong by now."

"Very well. Kiss me, for I suppose we sha'n't be home before one or two."

The carriage was round when they got down,

and after seeing them dash off May went into the snuggery and unlocked the cupboard. Durill was opening some boxes of cigars arrived that day, and smelling each carefully and then pinching it.

"Splendid, by Jove! That Jurando is a judge. Good cigar, eh, May?" putting one under her nose.

"Very fine, dear. Here we are at last," exclaimed May, as she seized an envelope triumphantly.

"What's that?"

"I told you on the stairs why I wanted the key. It is a prescription. Is that you, Parker?"

"Yes, Miss May."

"Come in, then. Here it is, and you can wait for it. Are you going alone?"

"No, ma'am; I was, but I have got Esther to go with me."

"The girl flushed while saying this, and May, laughing, said—

"So you are afraid of the ghost, Parker."

She made no reply, only smiled and closed the door.

"What's that about a ghost?" enquired Durill, tenderly stroking one of the huge cigars with his little finger.

May explained it to him.

"Well, upon my word this beats cock fighting. What ever has come over the place? First of all 'King Hop,' then Crispin sees the ghost of either you or Judy, then Ivo gets nearly put in a fit by a black man, and lastly Parker sees the ghost of Crispin."

"And Parker sticks to it, too; she seemed ready to drop when Crispin declared he had never been out."

"Well, I never pay any attention to Crispin's declarations, and I don't suppose you do, either, May, for he never did tell the truth since I remember him. But on this occasion he has told the truth, for after I left you I changed my mind, and did not go out, and I saw Parker come from

the servants' hall. I then went upstairs—that would be just about the time you sent the girl to find me—and I distinctly heard Crispin singing 'My pretty Jane' in his room."

"Then it could not have been Crispin Parker spoke to; I was in hopes it was. It is queer."

"Yes, it is; the end of it will be the domestics will not go out after dark except in twos and threes, and Wild Wood will get the reputation of being haunted. But talking about Parker reminds me. Did you notice her the night of Ivo's fright? I never saw anyone so scared before—Hardwick remarked it too—and I don't think she has ever been right since."

"Yes, I noticed it; and she confessed to being much frightened, and not feeling well made it worse. I wish I had desired her not to mention to-night's affair to anyone."

"It might have been as well, but it can't be helped, my dear."

On the following Tuesday morning Crispin re-

turned to College. Better things were hoped from him by the Squire and Durill, but Madam did not think any improvement necessary. Crispin was going to do great things, and in a few years he would be Sir Crispin Drever, the great physician. How all this was to be accomplished she had not the least idea. It was only one of those womanly delusions for which a mother may be pardoned.

The Squire sighed, and said he trusted Cris would not idle this term away; and Durill, in his deep tones, cheered him by saying he believed he intended to do better. As for Madam and Lois they shed many tears, and appeared at dinner looking very disconsolate. These two were the only ones who regretted the gay young man's departure.

Things went on smoothly enough for some time, and there appeared a black cloud; no bigger than a hand at first, but gradually it enlarged, till at last it covered Wild Wood. One

morning May was hearing Ivo his simple lessons in the nursery. They were travelling in England by means of an atlas, and had got as far as Devonshire, when the door opened, and Durill's head was popped in.

"May, will you give the boy holiday this morning, and come to me—I want you."

"Yes, Durill. There, Ivo, my dear, put away the books, and amuse yourself."

The child was only too willing—for what child, however studious, does not enjoy a holiday, especially when it is not expected?

May hurried down after Durill to the snuggery. She knew by the tone of the voice something was amiss, and she dreaded it concerned her father. He had not been well for the last week or two, and Dr. Tinley seemed anxious.

"Shut the door, May," said Durill.

He was standing with his back to the fire, and his white face and flashing eye bespoke only too well the rage within him. May did as desired;

she was a sensible girl; she never aggravated anyone in a temper, particularly a man, because they are not expected to have their passions so well under control. If all wives would only strive to do as May Drever did, many domestic quarrels would be avoided. Never speak to your husband when you see he is out of temper; never talk to him when he appears disinclined to talk; but, above everything, manage your household affairs yourself, and don't relate petty annoyances to him. Contrive to get plain sewing and other family work out of the way before he comes home, and be cheerful and good tempered to receive him. Nothing irritates or disheartens a man so much as a grumbling, complaining, long-faced wife,—one who is always ill. Indeed, it is often a puzzle to me how some men exist with their wives. They are to be pitied. If a girl wants a carriage to ride in she should not marry a man who does not keep one, because it is not conducive to happiness to hear your wife say her head-

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ache is for want of fresh air, and she does not feel able to walk. Unequal marriages are never any good; they are like unsuitable dispositions, they cannot possibly live together in peace and comfort. If you are a baker's daughter marry a butcher's son, unless every idea and impulse urges you to seek something better, unless your mind and ideas are superior to your position. If such be the case, don't allow anyone to deter you, make a way for yourself, and if you can marry higher do so. Sometimes we see a child, the centre of a large family, the parents hard-working people, who got their education at the exorbitant cost of one penny a week. That one child is cut out and fashioned for a higher sphere than that in which she was born. You see the father and mother and other children, a blunt, rough-spoken lot. How do you account for it? It is a freak of nature, for which there is no accounting. To wit, the cuckoo reared in the hedge-sparrow's nest.

May having closed the door, waited for Durill to speak, but he only handed her a letter, and unlocked his compressed lips to utter two words, "Read that." May did so without sitting down. She got paler as she read, and more like the angry man before her. It was a letter to the Squire from Crispin.

"My dear Father,

"Before I enter upon the subject which prompts me to write this letter, I must beg you not to be angry with me. I would not for worlds vex or distress you. But my position is not an enviable one; I am put here to mix with the sons of rich gentlemen and noblemen who do not even allowance their sons, while I am allowanced, and that allowance a very small one, not half sufficient to meet my expenses. I may, therefore, tell you that, as a natural consequence, I am in debt, I have been compelled to do so to keep up appearances, and I don't want

to press you further, as you told me when I left home that you were doing your best, and what you considered right; therefore there is but one way out of the difficulty remaining—I must sell my expectations. Will you kindly tell me what my share will be at your death, because those who have claims upon me know you, and will be quite contented to wait.

"Believe me, dear father,

"Your affectionate son,

"CRISPIN BENTON DREVER."

May put the letter down, and looked at Durill with flashing eyes.

"The young scoundrel," said Durill, and the deep voice sounded like the roll of a drum. "I would thrash him within an inch of his life if he were here now. To write to his father and ask him such a thing; it made my hair almost stand when I read it."

"It is like Crispin, Durill—it is just like him.

I wonder how you came to expect anything better from him. But how has papa taken it, and him so ill?"

"Very badly, May; he is awfully cut up, poor old man. It is almost as bad as saying 'How long are you going to live, I am tired of waiting.' I could twist the devil's neck for it."

"Does papa know you have this, Durill?" holding up the obnoxious epistle.

"Yes, to be sure; he told me to show it to May. I fancy he would like to see you."

"Very well, I will go. But what is going to be done about Crispin, who is to write?"

"Father cannot, that is certain. He is worse May, I am sorry to say; you will see for yourself; he is not up yet."

May's face went paler.

"I think we ought to have more advice. Suppose you write to Julius and tell him to bring down a clever physician to-morrow?"

"Yes, I will, but mother does not seem

alarmed; but I see a change, and Blake remarked it too, and now this confounded letter of Crispin's has put the finish to it."

"However is Crispin to be got out of his difficulties, Durill? Papa cannot do anything, I am sure, and your money! you will lose it?"

"Of course I shall, and don't name it, May; I prefer losing it to telling the Squire. As for him stumping up to the tune of several hundreds is out of the question. We are a large family, and the expenses of this establishment great. The Squire is rich, but then he won't part with money every day, and cannot without impoverishing the others. The life of a country gentleman is not a money-making one, therefore the plant must not be touched, else it is short commons for the next squire. Crispin will have to do anything he can, for I will not help him. He is going to be a second Gilbert, May."

"I am afraid so," replied May, sadly.

She left the snuggery, and sought her father.

He was sitting in a dressing-gown before the fire in his dressing-room. He looked, as Durill said, changed; there was a wearied look on the fine old face, and the eyes were rather dim. May's heart swelled as she stooped to kiss him.

"How do you feel this morning, papa?"

"Not so well, I think, my love, not so well. But I am getting old, May, and my time is almost spent."

"Nay, dearest papa, don't say so; what should I do without you?"

"Oh! well, my baby, *you* would miss me; but I have done my best for you, my pet, but Gilbert had more than his share, May, recollect. But I have left it all written down. Durill knows where everything is. A good son, Durill. God bless you both!"

May saw he was a bit hazy.

"What are you thinking of, papa?"

"Crispin's letter, my dear. Has Durill shown you?"

"Yes, papa, and it is just like Crispin; he is very selfish and thoughtless. You need not remember it, papa."

"No, I need not, when I have you. But it has hurt me, child, to be asked such a question, as if he could not have waited; it would not have been for long. May, either you or Durill must write him his answer, I cannot. Tell him his share is like the others—that is, Julius's and Gilbert's—but Gilbert has had his, and that he must pay his debts with that. I will not give him more than the rest. I did it for Gilbert, and greatly I repent it. Go and do it now, May—that is, one of you—I should not like to keep the lad waiting. And, May," he called, for she was near the door, "tell him I am not angry."

In the corridor May met Madam, looking very stately in her pretty white lace cap and violet satin cloth dress.

"Mamma, don't you think papa worse this morning?"

"I really don't know, child; he sent dear Lois out of the room half-an-hour since; said she was too noisy. Quite damped the sweet girl. He is very peevish, I think, if that is being worse."

May caught her arm as she moved on.

"Stay, mamma, I want to speak to you. Papa is worse; I see a change, and more see it beside me. Mamma, I am afraid papa is—sick unto death!"

"Good Heavens, May!" exclaimed Madam, starting back, and putting up her pretty white hands, "what are you talking about? Surely, I am the judge as to what ails your papa. You make me quite faint with your dreadful ideas, child!"

It was a picture, those two women, the young one speaking calmly of death, the old one recoiling at the mention of it. She had lived all those years, and never looked the King of Terrors in the face, while the young one, with her paltry twenty years, felt no alarm. The difference was this

—May was a soldier of the Lord's, and had on His armour; she wore the breast-plate of Faith, and the helmet of Salvation, and thus armed with the whole armour of Christ, she was ready to meet the King of Terrors. Madam Drever was defenceless. No wonder she was afraid of that relentless foe. Yet she called May "a child."

"The children of the next generation shall be wiser than the children of this."

When May returned to the snuggery she found Durill still there, writing to Julius.

"Well, May, what do you think of father?"

There was an instant's pause, and May seated herself.

"Durill, I think papa is dying, and I have told mamma so; but she does not see it."

The handsome face opposite her blanched.

"Is it so bad as that, my dear May? What makes you think it?"

"Various things. Papa spoke of how his

affairs are left, and he told me some little. But he wants one of us two to write to Crispin; who is to do it?"

"You shall decide, May."

"Then I choose to do it myself; it is better for me to quarrel with Crispin than you, now papa is going away."

"Did father tell you what to say, my good sister?"

"Yes; and I was to be sure and say he was not angry. Ready to forgive to the last you see, Durill."

CHAPTER IV.

Durill and May set to work in earnest to put things in order. Instead of waiting for the letter to reach Julius, Durill went to the station and sent a telegram, telling Julius to come the first thing in the morning or that afternoon, and bring Sir Richard Flint with him. Coming out of the station door he met Captain Hardwick and Chandos Stillwell, attended by his dog Nero.

"How are you, Drever? how is the Squire?"

"Very ill, I am sorry to say, Stillwell; I have just been sending for Sir Richard Flint; I met Tinley coming down, and he seemed to desire it."

"Dear me, I am extremely sorry. I had no idea things were so bad with the old gentleman; but let us hope he will take a favourable turn."

"Yes, we can hope, though I fear it is not much use, Hardwick. Madam does not perceive any alteration, and was quite put out when May told her. The others appear quite at ease, and think May and I are fanciful."

"That is often the case; those nearest cannot see the danger. How is Miss May?"

"Very well, thanks; only sorrowed, poor girl."

"Well, don't let us keep you, Durill. I will call this evening, and inquire after the Squire; and if I can be of any use, I am entirely at your service, my dear fellow, remember."

"Many thanks, Godwin; but I expect Julius down before long. Good-bye—good-bye, Chandos."

He swung himself on to his horse, and galloped off towards Wild Wood.

The cloud was getting larger and larger. There was an awful calm within and without Wild Wood, for it's master lay dying. Six called the

old clock in the court yard, and almost immediately horses' feet were heard clattering on the stones. Judy, May, and Durill were standing talking in a knot in the hall in whispers.

"That is the carriage," exclaimed Judy.

And just then Blake appeared on his way to the front door.

"Mr. Julius, sir," said he, as he past.

The three stood still, and Julius, followed by a tall, grave man, with silver hair, stepped in out of the darkness.

"How is my father, Blake?"

The old man shook his head.

"No better, Mr. Julius."

Durill and May stepped forward, and greeted Julius.

"Miss Drever, I presume," said Sir Richard Flint, smiling as he returned May's bow.

"No; this is Miss Drever," turning to Judy, who stood a little behind. "I am May Drever."

Blake conducted Sir Richard Flint to the

library, where waited Dr. Tinley and Mark, and presently all three went upstairs.

Julius threw off his great coat, and then turned to May and Judy, and kissed them. They gathered round the hall fire. Julius said that he wanted no refreshment, that he would go and see his father when the doctors came down. The conversation was about the Squire and his illness for several moments, when all at once Judy asked—

"Has any one recollected to send for Crispin?"

The one looked at the other. No, no one had remembered him. May had sent him his answer that morning, and it was a severe letter; but he well merited it.

"He has been omitted, Judy, I am sorry to say," said Durill; "but I will send a telegram at once. But he cannot get here before morning I fear."

"No, that he cannot; Oxford is rather a cross route," replied Julius.

Durill pulled the bell and rushed into the snuggery. He was back with a piece of paper in his hand almost as soon as William appeared.

"Take that to Jenkinson, and tell him to send a man at once to the station; not to lose a second."

"Yes, sir."

The four stood talking in low tones till the doctors came down, and entered the library. After a few moments Mark came out, and beckoned to Durill and Julius. There were many things running in May's mind as she stood by Judy before the glowing fire. The last time they had so stood it was morning, and they were laughing, and dear little Evelyn was with them. May glanced at Judy as she thought of what had caused that child's death. Mark and May had kept that secret well. No one knew it was the fall out of Judy's arms that day that had cut short her baby life. And now they were standing waiting, watching for death, expecting him to stride

in every moment, and lay his cold hand on their father and claim him for his own. The very ticking of the clock at the end of the spacious hall seemed mournful, seemed to be ringing a passing bell, while it went on tick, tick—tick, tick. The ticking wove itself into a human voice, May fancied, and it seemed speaking the same thing over and over again, and May, looking at it, wished it would say something else or stop. Again the carriage wheels sounded on the gravel, and the fairy Lois flitted out of the drawing room. There had been no dinner at Wild Wood that night.

"What is the carriage round for, May?" asked Lois.

She had evidently been asleep, and her pretty hair was rather tumbled, and her eyes and cheeks bright. She had cried herself to sleep over the fire like a spoiled child, and no doubt Madam and Minnie had done the same thing upstairs. Nurse Joyce was head of the sick room, with a

nurse from Guildford under her, a nice, mild, motherly sort of person, with such a kind face—Mrs. Jervis by name. She was a cheerful object for a sick person to look on, with her splendid white caps and smoothly braided hair. Lois had to repeat her question—

"What is the carriage round for, May?"

"To take Sir Richard Flint to the station, I suppose."

"Is he here?"

"Yes, Julius brought him by the last train."

Lois began to shake out the folds of her pretty green silk, and put her hair into shape. Perhaps she expected some dashing man of thirty or thirty-five. If so she was disappointed when the door opened and Dr. Tinley, Sir Richard, and Durill came out. But he was not disappointed with her, for he looked and looked again, and May fancied she saw his lips form the words—"What a lovely girl!" He came and shook hands with May and Judy, and wished them good evening. No one

seemed to remember Lois, and she took herself upstairs with a pouting mouth.

Durill saw the doctors out, and then came to the fire-place and passed an arm round Judy and May. The action of itself told plainly how things were: it was a silent impulse of the manly heart to protect and care for the girls so soon to be fatherless. It seemed to say, "I will try and fill his place." And May understood it, and turned her head on to his broad shoulder thankfully.

Durill did not attempt to screen things from them. He knew his sisters well, and he knew there would be no passionate outburst of grief.

"Sir Richard says father is sinking rapidly; that it is only a question of a few hours. He is suffering from a slight affection of the heart, but it is more a breaking up of the constitution than anything else."

No one made any reply, and Julius came down the stairs.

"Father thinks he would like to go to sleep

for a little, but he wants to see May and the rest of you first. Where's Lois?"

"She went upstairs," said Judy. "She is with mamma, no doubt."

They all went up and met Lois being carried out of her father's room in a dead faint by Mark. He put her down on the floor and motioned Durill to take her up, which he did, and put her on her bed. It was now after eight, and the Squire was sitting up in bed propped by pillows.

Madam sat at one side like one in a dream, and Minnie crying silently (for a wonder), stood near. He smiled to see the others come so quietly and tenderly round his bed. He knew perfectly well he was dying, and he spoke to them all clearly and earnestly. He charged Durill and Julius to see to the others, and his eyes rested on each by turns.

"My baby," said he, when it came to May, stretching out one hand. "You will see to the little lad, and Durill will see to you both. I

should like to have seen Gilbert and Crispin, but it cannot be."—Gilbert was out of town, or at any rate Julius could not find him.—"Be good to your mother, and don't let there be any quarrelling."

They kissed him and left the room.

It seemed like the parting of Jacob and his children, for the Squire was indeed going to journey in a far land.

There remained in the sick room the two nurses, and Madam went in by fits and starts. The end had come so suddenly that she appeared not able to understand that it was at hand. Mark, May, Durill, and Julius all went into May's dressing-room, and May made them some coffee. They none of them could go to bed, but sat listening for every sound. The Squire slept on till eleven, then he awoke. Madam was near him and he took her hand affectionately in his and murmured—

"Jeanie, we have journeyed long together, but

we must part now, my dear. Durill will be a good son; they are all good children, I hope; kiss me, my wife."

She bent and kissed the lips that years before had promised at the altar to love and protect her. And well he had kept that promise through all the long years spent together. She kissed him then, and she kissed him now, kissed him for the last time. But the kindly mouth returned no kiss.

Without a sigh or sound the good old man died, and the clocks chimed half-past eleven.

Gone at last; the cloud was over Wild Wood, for in the blue room lay—

JOHN REGINALD DREVER—dead.

CHAPTER V.

The news spread like wildfire, and great was the lamentation, for the Squire had done well for his people and gained their love and respect. It was a dreadful time for all, and May had little rest because Durill always wanted her. But the dressmakers brought home the mourning and May put hers on. It was the day of the funeral. The Squire in his coffin looked like some venerable old prophet, and May thought of the difference between the occupant of the last little coffin and this. Ivo stayed at home; he did not go to see his grandfather put in his last resting place, and May had him in her room. He fretted very much at first, but presently dried his eyes cheerfully and looked at May.

"What are you wondering about, my dear?"

"I was just thinking, Aunt May," answered the child, putting his arm round her neck, "that I would not cry any more for grandpapa, for Evelyn will be laughing, she will like to be with him so much. He will take care of her."

"But God will take care of your little sister, Ivo."

"Yes, I know, Aunt May; but then it will be more like home for her to have grandpapa. They can talk to each other."

The boy seemed quite comforted by the idea, and May let her thoughts follow the track pointed out by the little boy. Yes, it would be like that, Evelyn would be so glad to see her grandpapa, and May pictured them wandering about hand in hand—the old man and the little child—through the streets of gold, exploring its beauties. It was nice to think of two in heaven, papa and Evelyn. But soon the mourners returned, and the sound of the horses' measured tread made the old void come again in May's heart. It would

never be filled, never, while life was life. After a while Durill came for her and took her down to the Squire's study. They were all there, Crispin by Lois, and Judy told May Gilbert had come. It was so, for he then entered, leading Madam, who had been, since her husband's death, indulging in the most violent and senseless bursts of grief, and only now seemed consoled by the presence of her favourite and dissolute son. He was a good-looking man, like all the rest of the Benton Drevers, and he looked younger than he was because he had shaved off his moustache. Gilbert sat on one side of Madam, Lois on the other, Crispin and Minnie coming next. On the opposite side were ranged the dark ones, including Mark Calvert, while their uncle, Lord Ainsdale, sat pretty near Mr. Payne, the family lawyer; none of the more distant relations had remained; they had not been asked to do so by Durill. They were now assembled to hear the will read. May sat between

Durill and Julius, and her calm eyes noticed everything. Gilbert had not greeted her, but then she had not seen him for long, and he was not too fond of her. A few polite remarks, and the real business commenced.

"You have your father's keys, I presume, Mr. Durill?"

"No, Mr. Payne, my mother has them."

Madam handed the keys, and Durill pointed out the drawer to the lawyer. He opened it and took out a paper, looked at it, and put it down. Then he lifted his head.

"This is not the will, there is no will here."

There was a dead silence, then Durill spoke.

"My father told me that was the drawer, Mr Payne, but there is nothing to prevent you searching the others."

This the lawyer did, Durill did it, Julius did it, they all searched everywhere but with the same result. There was no will. A panic seemed to have taken all, their tongues clove to

the roof of their mouths. Mr. Payne was the first to speak; he stroked his bald head.

"The late Squire made a will, I know that, for I drew it up."

"Yes, my father did make a will, I am aware, and it was in that drawer, for he told me so the day before he died."

"It is very strange, Durill," said Lord Ainsdale, "where can it have got to—who has had the keys?"

"I have," replied Madam.

Nothing could be said, his wife, their mother, had been in possession of his keys.

Lord Ainsdale looked at Durill and raised his eyebrows.

"There is no one in the house whom you could suspect—none of the servants?"

"No, indeed; besides, what good would a will do them?"

"Ah! that's true, Durill—not any."

At the request of Madam another search was

made, but with the same result. There was no will or anything relative to it. What was to be done? Lord Ainsdale and the lawyer proposed a fair division. "You know," said Mr. Payne—looking at the faces of bewilderment before him—"Mr. Durill is Squire now, heir to the estate—owner of this house just as it stands. The surplus only belongs to you others, and of that your father made a fair division."

"How long ago, Mr. Payne?"

"About six years, I believe, Mr. Julius, but—"

"And are you aware that since then my brother Gilbert has had more than his share, by my father's own statement? If there is to be another division my sisters will have so much less."

"But," interposed Mr. Payne, "you did not allow me to finish, Mr. Julius. I was about to say that some two-and-a-half or three years since, the old will was burnt, and a fresh one

made. My clerk attended; I was from home at the time."

Gilbert's face had gone like chalk, and he now turned upon Julius furiously.

"What was that you said, Julius? I had money from my father? You lie. I had not; and I have a just right to an equal portion with the rest of you, unless you have any proof that you can show."

There was no proof, alas! no papers.

"Your clerk will probably recollect the nature of the Squire's last will, he had better be appealed to."

"Alas! Lord Ainsdale, we cannot do that, poor old Gibberton died fourteen months ago."

"But one thing we can do, Mr. Payne," said Julius, "and that is, try to find the witnesses; they must have been some of the household?"

"True, Mr. Julius; and I remember that to the first will there was the name of Thomas Blake."

"Indeed! then ring for Blake," said Durill.

The old man did not keep them waiting long.

"Blake," began Mr. Payne, "you remember being witness on one occasion to a will of your late master's; can you recollect the date?"

"No, sir, I cannot—neither of the dates—I have been witness twice. The first time was some five or six years since, and the last time about three years since. The last time was on a Thursday morning. I remember that, also that the old gentleman that gave me and Wigg—he was footman then—the pen, was named Gibberton, because I heard master call him that."

"And did Wigg act as witness?"

"Yes, sir; we both signed."

When Blake had gone, the others went on to state the terms on which the Squire had spoken of Gilbert having had more than his share, and May related what he said to her the day he died. But Gilbert only sneered, and Mr. Payne shook his head.

It was only too true, Gilbert could claim his share with the others; he said he had not had the money, and there was nothing to show that he had. His word was as good as theirs. The conference was brought to a close, and Mr. Payne was invited by Durill to stop a few days. This the old gentleman agreed to do, it would save him coming down again. Lord Ainsdale bade his nephews and nieces an affectionate adieu, and departed.

When the others had gone Mr. Payne, Durill, and Julius commenced a scientific search; they turned everything upside down, but it was all useless.

"I'll tell you what it is, Durill; the will has gone clean away, and it is no use us looking any more. Do you think your father could have burnt it?"

"No, Mr. Payne, I am positive my father never touched it, and he died, believing it was in this drawer. It is a complete mystery to me,

and I can see no way out of it. My sisters must have their money."

"Well, there is only one thing to do. Divide whatever is over. It can never be settled any other way, for your father cannot come back to make a fresh will."

"But the will may yet be found, Mr. Payne."

"I am afraid not, Julius; whoever took your father's will won't let it come back, be sure of that, and it was made that's quite certain, and it could not go without hands."

Durill pulled his moustache.

"It is a puzzle truly, and a very unfortunate thing for us all."

It was an unfortunate thing, Durill said, truly. Madam and his sisters were welcome to stay till he married, then he must have Wild Wood to himself. But the sisters must have their money; and how was Crispin to be got through? Everything was at a standstill, because none of them would agree to Gilbert having a second

share, and besides there would be precious little left if that was to be the case. And then, how were things left? The Squire had told Durill that Mill Bank, now rented by Mr. Walker, was Judy's, but there was nothing to show for it.

The will was not found, and Gilbert stayed on, and Crispin loitered about.

Madam could not be made to see the necessity for some settlement. Meanwhile all were living at the expense of Durill, and it was anything but a happy home. Now and then Durill had to assert his authority to prevent some mad idea from being carried out. But Durill was determined, and forbade any orders being executed but those given by himself.

About this time May had a few words to say to Durill, which caused great sorrow to him. The Squire had been dead a month, and everything was in a muddle. It did not suit May, so she determined to help herself. Where there's a will there's a way.

May set to work with a will, and her efforts were rewarded. She got a good situation as governess in a clergyman's family in Flintshire. But then she had to tell Durill, and this May shrunk from. But Durill made the discovery himself, and in this wise. One day May had been writing to the said clergyman; all was not yet arranged, and Durill came in and saw the letter.

"My darling, who is this—

"'Revd. Walter Wentworth,

"'Caelderstoke Rectory,

"'Caelderstoke,

"'Flintshire?'"

"It is a gentleman whose little daughters I am thinking of being governess to."

"May!" exclaimed Durill, starting; "what, are you going to leave me?"

"Not willingly, dear Durill; but I have no

allowance now, and I cannot dress on nothing. Besides there are so many of us living upon you, and I won't do it. It was another thing when papa was alive."

May's cheeks burnt; she was a proud girl was May Drever, but it was proper pride.

"My dearest girl," and Durill caught her to him, "I cannot part with you. Father left you to me, and he left Ivo to you, May. Have you forgotten?"

"No, Durill, but—"

"Stop, May, I have not done. I cannot let you go to be governess to any man's children, and moreover I want a governess myself. I want *you.* And now I offer you a situation, your allowance to be the same as when our father lived, to teach Ivo and take care of him, and assist me with the work as usual."

May's eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you, Durill, but you are only doing it to keep me."

"No, May, honour bright; I do want help. How should I manage? I should be obliged to get a farmer, and a governess for the little chap."

"But, Durill, perhaps his father will want him home."

"Home! he has no home to take him to, child. No, Gilbert will not want him; it is an understood thing that. But May, listen, is it a bargain?"

"What? that I stay as assistant and governess to you?"

"Yes."

"I suppose so, Durill."

"Then write to the reverend gentleman, and tell him you have a situation with your brother. Are you in want of any money now, May? because I have plenty. That venture succeeded beyond my expectations, only I don't care for anyone else to know it."

"I am so glad. No, I can do for a little while,

I have a few pounds left from paying for my black."

"Very good; then that is settled; and recollect in future, May, come to me when you want anything, and don't be so independent. It would break my heart to lose you, darling. And now I have got something to tell you, May. I can't stand this state of things any longer. Gilbert tries to be master and so does Crispin, and between the two the things are going to wrack and ruin. The reason I forbade any of the men obeying their orders was because the last time I went to town Gilbert and Crispin took it into their heads to drive tandem. Hardwick saw them going along by Echo Pit like mad. Well, the finish was, they came to grief at the bottom of the slope, threw the horses down, and smashed both shafts. That was how Gilbert got his lovely face scratched, though he told his doating mother such a neat fib about it. I did not dare to say much because there would sure to have been a

scene. And that is the way things are going on. I don't wonder at your wanting to go, May, but I shall do another way. I shall dismiss them."

"How can you, Durill?"

"This way. Gilbert evidently intends to remain as long as he chooses because I object to a second division. Now Julius and I have decided to make a division and leave Gilbert out entirely, because he has had his portion, though he denies it. But his father told it out the night the children came, as Madam must remember, only she won't do it. Now we are going to make a fair division, and if Gilbert objects or makes any fuss we are going to throw it into Chancery. It will make no difference to Julius and none to me. I shall not benefit by the division, and Julius is quite independent of it, he has a capital practice. But we will not see our sisters robbed: there are four of you, and Judy will never marry, therefore it is necessary that she should have what is honestly hers. And while the suit is

going forward you will all remain here as usual, with the exception of Gilbert and Crispin."

"And what will he do?"

"Crispin? What he likes best; he has wasted his time; he ought to have passed last term and be making money for himself now. It just serves him right, May, and every one else that is idle. But he will not want for anything, never fear. Madam's income is large enough to keep him going. She has about seven hundred a-year. My father never touched it, and that, no doubt, will be divided between Gilbert and Crispin at her death. Lois is to marry some earl, of course."

"I did not know she had so much. But, Durill, I wanted to ask you something, and talking about mamma's money reminds me. How much do you think papa left us girls; I mean how much a-year?"

"Well, May, I believe the most it could be would be two hundred a year each. That is our calculation, and to the best of Payne's know-

ledge. And that is the particular reason, since you must know, why Julius and I are firm in not letting it be again divided. Because if Gilbert is to have another share it would reduce the income of you girls to a few pounds over a hundred a-year. And recollect, May, you have no prospect of any more, for our relations all have families. Father left Mill Bank to Judy, he told me, no doubt intending that those who did not marry could live there; and to the holder of Mill Bank I am always to pay two hundred a year. That is if she is not married."

"What a good idea of papa's. It always ensures us a home, and supposing Judy and I lived there together, how comfortable we could be, and take Ivo from you, because you will want to marry soon."

"I don't know, May; but when I do Madam will have to turn out. Perhaps she would go to Mill Bank, but I certainly would not bring my wife home to a mother or mother-in-law."

"I think you are quite right to have things settled, Durill. And when is it to be commenced?"

"This is the 5th of March; Julius comes down on the 13th, and then if Gilbert will not agree to terms the suit will commence; because I will provide for you and Judy and the boy, and Madam must take Lois. The money shall remain untouched while Julius and I live before Gilbert shall have what is not his. It is a most extraordinary thing the disappearance of our father's will, May, for I saw it in that very drawer one day when he told me to get the deed of the cottages out, a day or two after little Evelyn died. It was labelled as large as life—'Last will and testament of John Reginald Drever.' I saw it, May, lying at the right hand corner of the drawer, and I shut the drawer with it in."

"And I am sure papa did not touch it, Durill, because he said to me when I went to him about Crispin's letter, 'I have done my best, but Gilbert

had more than his share, recollect, May; but I have left it all written down. Durill knows where everything is.' Durill, do you know I cannot help thinking of Ivo's nightmare, he never has had it but that once. Do you think it possible that Ivo's 'black man' can have anything to do with the missing will?"

"Good gracious, May, what an idea. Why, what good would a will do a robber? It is not like silver, he could not melt it down, and you forget the drawer was locked; besides, there was not a creature in the house, for we searched everywhere. No, that was a creation of little Ivo's brain. I cannot think of any way out of the mystery, for Madam had the keys after father's death, and moreover the will would do no one any good."

It did indeed appear a hopeless mystery.

"Have you said anything to Crispin about that letter?"

"No, not a word. He has avoided me, and I

him. For, to tell the truth, May, I have barely patience to look at him, let alone speak. He is always after his mother like a lap-dog, and all they do is done on the sly. They seem to regard me as an interloper, but there will be an alteration shortly."

Durill did not in the least exaggerate. The appearance of affairs was anything but peaceable, and the servants had noticed what he complained of. Madam and her pet children treated Durill, the master of Wild Wood, with marked disrespect, and it was she who wished them to have their own way. At dinner it was the same. Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Crispin were to have the first attention. It was with them she conversed, rarely speaking to Durill, excepting when courtesy demanded it. The servants remarked freely about it in the servants' hall, and wondered how Mr. Durill could sit in his father's place and endure such conduct. But he did do it, and never differed. He behaved to Gilbert and Crispin with

perfect politeness, as any gentleman would behave to his guests; and to his mother he was kindness itself, always showing her the greatest respect, and consulting her wishes upon everything. He did not desire her to be reminded that her husband was dead. But it was just a house divided, and old Blake was correct when he said—

"It cannot stand."

No. However, Durill's patience was getting exhausted, but still he was willing to keep peace if possible. He was ever mindful of the Squire's words, "Above all let there be no quarreling."

"I would sooner do anything than have a quarrel, because I never quarrel but once. But if they are to have the run of the place, there will be nothing but disgrace and misery; and I have made up my mind if Madam cannot part from her sons, and live on peacefully with me, she must turn out and go to one of them, but have the lot on the present terms I will not."

"I shall be glad when Gilbert goes, I must say, and so will his child. Ivo seems to fear his father, and I fancy Judy has had some disagreement with him."

"So do I, May; they rarely speak, and I think Judy looks wretchedly ill, poor girl. I notice she avoids him as much as possible; it is an awful state of things."

CHAPTER VI.

One day Captain Hardwick was announced. Blake came to Durill and May to tell them; no doubt he guessed pretty well that the others would not be too civil to a friend of Durill's.

"Very good, Blake. May, you go darling, and tell Godwin I will be with him directly. I want to finish this calculation."

May rose at once, and repaired to the library, where she found Captain Hardwick warming his hands over the cheerful blaze.

"How are you, Miss May?"

"Quite well, I thank you. Durill will come shortly; meanwhile I am to take care of you."

He smiled at her, and did not let go her hand. He was not a man to beat round the bush; he

had come with something on his mind, and he seemed determined to settle it at once. It is all very well for youths and green hands to be tumultuous and bashful; but imagine a great big, broad-shouldered fellow, over thirty, stammering and stuttering, and turning alternate shades of red and white. But there was none of that about Captain Hardwick, he held May's hand and spoke in his usual quiet, grave tones. He was very earnest; it showed how serious a subject it was to him.

"My visit is to you to-day, not to Durill; nevertheless I shall be glad to see him. May, I want you for my wife; I have not much to offer, but I truly love you, and it will be the one effort of my life to render yours happy. I would have spoken to your father, but I did not know his end was so close, and he once said in my presence, 'May and I will never part till the last parting.'"

May did not interrupt him; she let him take her quite close to him, in his grave, fatherly

way, and he went on pleading in low, earnest tones.

"My darling, let me have you. Your mother will part with you, and Durill will, I know, and you will never repent it, May."

This roused May, and she drew back, but not far. May did not wish to conceal her feelings towards the big soldier. She loved him faithfully, trustingly, lastingly; but she could and must wait, there were too many things to be thought of before matrimony. He was waiting for her to speak. When she moved away from him his brown face had gone a yellowish white, but there was no outward sign of disappointment or emotion; he thought how nice she looked, his love, in her plain black dress as she stood before him so composedly; how nice it would be to have that girl for his wife, to have that calm face to look at. And then he changed his position, for May was a long time answering; but she raised her clear eyes at last, and a pleasant,

cheerful smile danced round the well-formed mouth.

"I cannot give you your answer to-day, Captain Hardwick, nor for some time. You must let things return to what they were, forget that you have spoken, or let it pass by for ever."

"But, May, dearest, you love me?"

"Yes, Godwin, I do, but I must not forget my family; we are in trouble at present, and they must have all my attention. I can go on loving you, Godwin, but I cannot enter upon any engagement, because it would give quite a different tone to everything."

"Well, my dear, you know best, and I trust you. We will not be engaged publicly but privately?"

"No, we will have no engagement at all, because there is no telling how things may end, and I will not be bound; I must be free to follow my own judgment."

"Then let it be so. You are mine, May, but

I won't claim you, since you don't wish it. One kiss, darling, before Durill comes."

He bent his head, and she raised her face. Their lips met in one long, earnest kiss, and then it was all over.

And when Durill entered he found them demurely sitting one on one side of the fire-place the other on the other, talking about the Premier's speech.

Perhaps you think it an over-drawn and very cold, unnatural, unlikely, love scene. Don't imagine that everyone's love is so violent, and that there is such an amount of hugging and kissing gone through. It is unromantic, I will grant, but one does not often meet with romance in everyday life, and then there is a great difference in the way people love. Some love for years and never make a sign, others go frantic for the space of three weeks, and at the end of a month it is all over.

May's and Captain Hardwick's love was of the

former kind. They could take one kiss, and have done with it; they could wait, because they loved too well to doubt. Their love was not a fitful flame that always required fuel to keep it going; it burnt steadily deep down in each heart, and they were not afraid of it going out. And now the love passage being over, they gave their attention to politics, in the midst of which Durill discovered them.

"I hope May has not been maltreating you, Godwin; she is very merciless in her arguments."

Hardwick laughed; perhaps he thought of the kiss, and what sort of "maltreatment" Durill would call that.

"Oh! no; Miss May and I generally agree. We were just speaking about the non-passing of that bill, 'Marriage with a deceased wife's sister.'"

"Eh? Well, what do you think about it, Hardwick?"

"Well, I think it ought to pass. In the first place, who is so fitted to take charge of the children (if there be any) as the wife's sister? She will love them for the sake of their mother, if not for their own. And what young lady would consent to live in a man's house without his wife being there? And what man could expect it? Consequently the children must be left to the care of servants, unless the aunt can run down for an hour or two daily. And, lastly, why must a man be deprived of having a second good wife as well as a first. It often happens that sisters are alike, and it is hard if a fellow must pass by a girl that he knows he should be happy with just because she happens to be sister to the wife he has lost."

"Very true, Hardwick, and I agree with you. But we are both men, and only see one side of the matter. I wonder what a woman's idea is? May, love, what is yours?"

"That a man should be prohibited from

marrying his wife's sister. You say truly, you are both men and see things differently to us women. But supposing, Durill, you had a wife whom you cared for very dearly indeed, and you met with an accident and knew you had only a short time to live, do you suppose your last hours on earth would be the happier for the thought that probably before you had been two years in your coffin that dearly loved wife would marry Crispin or Julius? (Durill winced.) I should not like to think that if I died my husband would marry Lois. The idea of him marrying at all would be bad enough; but so close to home would be dreadful. I don't think I could die with that on my mind. And how would it be with a jealous woman? Her life would be misery, and instead of loving that sister she would hate her. And now I will take the sister-in-law's place. How could a sister-in-law marry her brother-in-law? She may marry him, but

she cannot love him; it is impossible. After kissing that man as a brother, talking and thinking of him as a brother, she cannot love him as a husband. They are two distinct loves. There is a sense of duty, and it is wrong to tempt a girl, because if there are any dear little babies she might consider it a duty to her dead sister to take charge of those children, and the only way to insure them against a step-mother is to be step-mother to them herself. If Minnie died to-morrow I could not marry Mark, though I love him very much—more than all but you, Durill. I could not endure to take Minnie's place, every feeling of my heart cries out against it, and I believe it is so with every sister-in-law. No, when a man's wife dies, if he wants another he should seek her in a strange place, and pick a good, well-disposed girl; because I don't think it is possible for a religious girl to be an unkind, careless step-mother. How

can she when she knows that the mother is looking down on her children day and night and sees all she does?"

May Drever touched on a grave subject, that of a step-mother. There is not a more serious undertaking than accepting the charge of another woman's children. People seem to think with one accord that every step-mother is unkind to the first children. It is often, I am pleased to say, a great mistake; many second mothers are as good to the first children as their own mother could have been; and it is generally a hard battle, especially if the children be rather old. They resist the young mother's authority, and she gets disheartened and loses her temper. The husband is informed when he comes home, and he, annoyed that his wife should be distressed, beats the offending boy or girl. Then commences the battle which generally lasts a life-time. In infancy the flame is fanned by some doting but injudicious old domestic, and when the child attains riper

years it recollects all the acts of harshness and injustice, till the list of grievances swells so big it is never forgotten. To be a step-mother it takes a woman with a natural turn for the management of children. Then she may succeed and be happy. But it is an unequal contest to take a young, inexperienced, spoilt girl, and expect her to govern with tact and judgment three or two children who have been deprived of a mother's guidance a year, or even less. It is no enviable place, that of a step-mother. She has a double duty to perform, and then she must try to do what their mother in Heaven would have done—teach them as she would have taught them. What woman, as she hopes for mercy at the last day, would be guilty of neglect or cruelty to the babies whose mother watches from afar off? She sees every slap they get on their little fat backs, every tear they shed, and oh! how she must long to gather them in her arms and comfort them, pillow their baby heads on her breast.

Who can wonder at a mother when dying wanting to take her little ones with her? Ah! reader, whoever you are, remember you can never do enough or be too kind and tender to a motherless child, for every hurt to one of those little ones is a thorn in their poor mother's side. But by making them happy you give their mother no cause to grieve, and she is at rest. Then when your turn comes you will not be afraid to meet the angel woman who in life you never knew. You will be tied to your Saviour with a stronger link, for does He not charge you, "Feed my lambs?" and you will have fed his motherless lambs.

Captain Hardwick looked astonished at May's earnest appeal, but it had its weight. He did not think he should like any one else to marry May. Durill smiled.

"You hit home, Lady May. It is quite true, though, what you say, and it is a good thing the Bill has not passed. The world has done without

it so far, and it will do to the end, I suppose. What, going, Hardwick? Then I shall walk part, if not all the way with you."

Durill went with Captain Hardwick, and May put on her hat after they had gone, and took Ivo with her to the Post. Coming out of the Post-office she met the Misses Gradwell and "Sweet Fellow." They would talk, of course, about nothing, and they found they had only half an hour to get to the house and dress for dinner.

"We must make haste, Ivo dear."

"Very well, Aunt May; I can run if you like," replied the ever willing child.

Almost out of breath, they reached the Court Yard, and turned in at the side door.

The clock wanted just ten minutes to six, but May was ready to go down with Durill when the gong sounded. Gilbert took Madam in and Durill made no objection.

It was very cold these early days in March, it was raw and bleak the wind that met you.

"You have a colour to-night, May," remarked Durill, when the soup was going round.

"Yes, it is the wind. Ivo and I had to hurry up from the village. The Gradwells kept us talking so long. My cheeks feel quite hot."

"Captain Hardwick was here to-day, was he not?" enquired Lois.

"Yes, he was, Lois," coolly replied May.

"I desire to be apprised when he next comes," said Madam, glancing severely at May.

"I have not the least objection to you knowing, mamma."

There was a sparkle in May's eyes as she looked at Durill.

"I did not know it was customary for young ladies to receive gentlemen alone," remarked Gilbert, satirically.

Silence for a second, then came a deep voice, like a bell—

"You are not expected to know anything about it, sir, or to give an opinion. A guest is

not supposed to question what his host may do. May has my full permission to do whatever she likes in this house. For your benefit, madam, I beg to state that Capain Hardwick paid his visit to me, and I received him in the library."

Madam and Gilbert made no answer to this speech, but looked extremely crestfallen and frightened. They had gone too far, and trod on the lion's tail, and they perceived it. It would not have needed much more to have made Durill pitch Mr. Gilbert out of the window for his insolence. Old Blake fairly chuckled, and William and James looked rather scared at the great angry man with his flashing eyes sitting at the bottom of the table. Madam now did her best to conciliate Durill and May, and unbent wonderfully. But it was not needed with either of them; they were too noble-minded to carry on petty feuds, especially with their mother, and in a moment or two big Durill was smiling and doing the honours of his table with a stately grace that seemed to

belong to the time of powdered hair, knee breeches, and buckles.

When Madam rose, followed by her daughters, Gilbert and Crispin did so too, and Durill, smiling courteously, enquired whether they would take no wine?

"No, they would take none."

"Then, Blake, be so good as to ask Miss May to return and keep me company."

And he resumed his seat.

May came back, looking rather astonished.

"Why, Durill, I am not a man; what will mamma say?"

"What she likes, my dear. Since her pet sons are such boorish young men she must pardon her daughter setting them a better example. I am no wine bibber, and I don't care to drink my port in solitude; I like a cigar and a chat over it. I would much sooner have you than those fellows, May. Have a glass of this port, love."

"No, thanks, Durill."

"Well, then, a glass of sherry; you had only one to your dinner. How is it you only take one, May?"

"It is plenty, Durill; that is why. This is very comfortable."

CHAPTER VII.

It was a comfortable room that great, handsome, sombre dining room at Wild Wood. The furniture was dark oak and crimson morocco. The chairs were those old straight-backed ones, with dogs' and stags' heads carved on them. The sideboard was splendid, one solid piece of perfect oak. On the back was carved the crest, a stag's head and motto of the Drever family—

"Fiat justitia ruat cœlum." ("Let justice be done though ruin ensue.")

There were three groups of animals carved magnificently, and the edges were holly and berries. The table was of immense length; the massive legs had a face carved on each side, all men's. The walls were ornamented with valuable

pictures, nearly all the portraits of dead and gone Drevers. The Squire's was not up yet, and one of the others must join its brethren in the hall to make room for it. The Drevers were a good old English family, and every single thing bespoke their high position; nothing was ever disturbed or modernised. The glass goblets on the table were as massive as glass could be and as thin as wafers. The rich wine sparkled and danced in the fire light whenever Durill chanced to move. It was, indeed, a goodly picture, and it was not a little improved by the handsome man and tall pale girl in her long black robes, who sat with her intelligent thoughtful face, slightly bent.

"Durill, why don't you invite some gentlemen to dinner? It is so lonely for you, with only Gilbert and Crispin, who are so disagreeable."

"I don't know, love, and I am not at all lonely when I have you. But I might ask Hardwick and Cavendish some night to be sure.

Perhaps better not till things are settled. I shall thrash that Gilbert before long, I feel it; the insolent fellow. We are watched, you see, May. I wonder how they got to know Godwin was here?"

May laughed.

"I fancy we are indebted to Lois for that discovery."

"I dare say; she is on the look out for any thing with a pair of legs. I wish to goodness I could find her a husband; that would be one gone. I would not mind if she were anything like you, but she is just the sort of girl to drive any fellow mad. Is there, think you, anyone who would be eligible, because I would immediately invite him here?"

The smile that had wreathed May's face during Durill's speech now expanded into a laugh.

"Poor Lois, you seem bent upon getting quit of her at any price. No, I don't recollect anyone. She has tried her blandishments upon every single

gentleman for miles round. I advise you to import some fresh ones, Durill."

At this they both laughed, and in the midst of their mirth the door opened and in walked Madam. Widow's weeds suited her; she was indeed a sweetly pretty woman. Her fair hair was just getting silvered, but her skin was as smooth as her daughter Lois's. She looked a wonderfully young mother to call that great man son. Durill rose and offered her a chair, with a look of astonishment on his handsome face. But she did not seat herself; she glanced at May and then up at Durill.

"Thank you, Durill," said she, smiling like a perfect angel, "but I wanted to speak to *you*, my son."

"Well, mother, I see nothing to hinder you; pray sit down."

"Yes, the presence of a third person."

May had at the first perceived that she was in the way, and had risen.

"I will go, mamma," said she, at once moving.

"No you won't," exclaimed Durill, passing his arm round her. "Mother, whatever you have to say must be said before May; she is my helper and confidant in all matters. Our father trusted her, surely you can."

Madam smiled again, and crossed her white hands on her lap.

"You forget, Durill, May is very young; the youngest of the family."

"No, madam, I don't forget; she is the youngest in years but the oldest in sense. It is a great pity May did not arrive earlier."

Madam made a sweet reply about "Your great love for the dear girl."

She had made up her mind not to be angry or vex Durill; it would not suit her book just then. Madame Drever was like a cat, she could keep her claws in when it suited her.

"Yes, my love is great; sit down again, May

dear. And now, mother, what is this important business?"

"I don't suppose you will think it important, Durill; you think me a weak, silly woman, and my nerves are not strong, particularly since my dear husband's death." Here Madam used her lace handkerchief in a saintly style. "It is my ardent desire to render my family happy and at peace. Now, I should like my daughter-in-law to visit me; it is dreadful to think we have never received her yet, and her child and husband here. Dear Gilbert is so uncomplaining and afraid of giving trouble or offence that he refrains from mentioning it himself, but I cannot shut my eyes to it, and I feel it my duty to invite her."

"Well, madam, and is that my business?"

"My son, don't be severe; you look like my dear John used to do sometimes. I thought I would mention it to you lest you should be surprised when she comes."

"I shall indeed be very much surprised when

she does. But I cannot bring myself to forbid you inviting your guests, mother, while you remain under this roof, though I beg you to postpone receiving your daughter-in-law till you have a house of your own. I have put up with a deal lately. I am at variance with the husband, and I don't want the wife."

"And why are you not friendly with Gilbert?"

"Because he wants his own way, which is not a just way."

"But I really think what he says is perfectly right. Gilbert has told me everything since he has been here, and I must say I do think the Squire was too hard upon him, poor fellow. He assures me he never had the money, Durill, and he ought to have his share."

"Can you tell me who got him out of his difficulties many a time if my father did not?"

"Why I assisted him several times. It is no use talking to me, Durill; my family were always

merry, open-handed people, and Gilbert takes after the Bentons."

"It is of no consequence whom he takes after. I intend to look after my sisters and stand firm."

"Durill, have you forgotten what your father said about peace?"

It was evident she intended to hold up the poor Squire's speech to make Durill give in to Gilbert.

"No, mother, I have not forgotten, and I don't want to quarrel; but you know what the motto of the Drevers says. I intend to have justice done, mother, at any price, and you may tell your son so if you like."

Madam's face flushed.

"I really cannot allow such conduct, Durill. Recollect Gilbert and Cris are your brothers, and while I remain in this house I will have them treated kindly, and I shall invite Emily to come and stay here."

Durill kept his temper.

"Mother, it is not my intention or wish to treat any one unkindly, and you are at liberty to invite the lady. I have told you I do not wish it. I cannot say more to you; but remember I will not have those two young men riding rough-shod over everything. The Squire did not permit it, and I won't."

"Your father was too severe, Durill. He did not understand their gay, fearless natures."

"That is a matter of opinion. I expect Julius down on the 13th, and most probably Mr. Payne."

Madam appeared rather scared.

"Surely you are not going to make another fuss to find the will, Durill?"

"I fear it is not much use to, but I am going to make one more attempt to induce Gilbert to hear reason and submit to the division."

"Which he never will do, and no one expects it but you."

"Yes, Julius expects it, and Uncle Ainsdale."

"Of course you and Julius go hand in hand against poor Gilbert. It is a wonder your father does not rise out of his grave to see such unbrotherly conduct.'

Madam here commenced to cry violently.

"I only wish he could," replied Durill. "We should then find out who speaks the truth."

Madam made no reply, but sighing deeply and covering her face with her handkerchief, made for the door, which Durill, politely opening, bowed her out.

May had sat a silent spectator of this scene, and Durill, after shutting the door, returned to his seat.

"Confound it all, they are never at peace a day. Must have the wife down here, forsooth. I firmly believe Gilbert and Crispin put mother up to coming in here with her mouth full, and I should not be surprised if Gilbert had his aristocratic ear to the key-hole all the time."

"I think it is the most likely thing. I had

rather anything than have Mrs. Gilbert here, for Ivo's sake. I wanted him to forget his parents."

"Can't we get Mark to take him to stop with his children while she is here?"

"Yes, we could, but it would look so marked, and mamma would be certain to object."

"Umph! it is an awful nuisance. We would go to town for the time, May, only heaven help the place when I am away. What do you think old Blake told me? That Gilbert and Crispin have brandy taken upstairs every night to their rooms, and between them they manage to put away a bottle each night."

"How disgraceful!" ejaculated May, horrified. "And have you stopped it, Durill?"

"No, my dear, I don't care to do a thing like that, and it won't be for long either. But it is bad when gentlemen take to drinking in their bed-rooms. I should not care what they took down stairs, it is taking it up with them that disgusts me. But Blake is afraid they will set

the house on fire some night, and that I think was his reason for telling me."

"Dear me! I wish they would go; I agree with Blake, it is quite possible that when they are half muddled they may place a candle too close to the curtains or something. I shall never rest now."

"Nonsense, May!"

"Indeed, Durill, I sha'n't; I have such a horror of fire."

Madam was as good as her word, and one morning Mrs. Morrison told May she had orders to prepare the buff rooms, and move Mr. Gilbert there, for his lady was expected on the morrow. No one seemed to relish the idea of Mrs. Gilbert, and when May said to Ivo—

"Your mamma is coming to-morrow, dear."

Ivo replied "Oh! Aunt May, she won't take me away, will she?"

"I trust not, Ivo."

May did not dare to say no to the child, for

she did not know what they would do, and she loved the little fellow dearly; he was just the boy to make a noble, industrious man. It seemed as if her father's words "and you will see to Ivo," bound her to the child, it was a sort of injunction to her to protect him.

Gilbert's wife arrived on the 12th, Tuesday, and the large carriage went down to meet her, with Gilbert and Lois in it. Judy would not go, but came and stood with May over the drawing-room fire. Lately there had been a fearful darkness over poor Judy's face, and it grieved May and Durill as much as anything. She had kept out of their way, too, and Durill regretted time after time that he had not been able to lend her that money when she asked him. May stayed a few moments, and then said she must go.

"Do stay till she comes, May, it will be better than waiting till everyone is here," and Judy sighed deeply.

"Well, since she is such a formidable person, I will stay, for they ought to be here directly."

May's calculation proved correct: at that instant the carriage drove up, and Madam's voice was heard in the hall. She had come down to receive her daughter-in-law. May standing far back from the near window saw her get out with a jump; she saw Lois's face of disgust, and even Gilbert's was red. But the servants made no attempt to conceal their amazement; old Davis had his nose straight in the air, and sat as stiff as a poker, while on the face of the footman there sat a broad grin. There are none so sharp as servants—they see all there is to be seen, and don't forget to pass their opinions. They consider themselves of great importance, and from living years in families like the Drevers, can tell a lady at the first glance, no matter how she is dressed. One may nearly always tell the sort of people to whom the carriage belongs by the looks

of the servants. Notice the next time you go down the great shopping street in your town, and you will see some splendid equipage standing at the first and most expensive shop. It is empty, and the men are chuckling together in their claret livery and gold-banded hats.

Presently the lady will come out, good-looking in most cases, and beautifully dressed, the best of everything on her. The coachman gives the footman a nudge if he happens to be by his side, as much as to say "Here she is," and that individual getting down opens the door in an indifferent manner, and bangs it to in a cabby sort of style. Then looks into his mistress's face in a "cheeky" way, and she gives her orders in a nasal twang, or else buttoning her mouth up chops the tail off each word as she drawls them out in a languid manner. Then if we follow her into the next shop, we shall hear her ask the young person behind the counter for some "taten" cotton, in a most domineering, objectionable

manner, that brings the colour to the young girl's face. Nothing shows a lady so much as the way she speaks to a person in a lower position than herself. However poor and plain the dress, there is something about the unassuming, quiet, calm dignity of a true lady that commands respect. A lady is never afraid of losing caste by speaking and smiling in an agreeable way to the poorest or meanest of God's creatures. Her safeguard lies in her mind. That being superior soars high above the heads of all others, even though they be dressed in "gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls," and through life, however she may be jostled in her struggle for bread, she will never be contaminated.

Judy moved to the door, followed by May, who began to understand why Judy was so anxious to get the presentations over.

There was pride in Judith Drever, and she wanted to conceal as far as possible the shortcomings and innate vulgarity of the girl Gilbert

called wife. The hall was pretty well filled, and on every face there was printed astonishment in large letters. That great bouncing creature Mr. Gilbert's wife! Madam appeared to sink into her dress, as she made a stately bend, and a disgusted look came into her face. But nevertheless she acted her part, and decked her face with a smile. Blake seemed to be contrasting the loud spoken female with "our young ladies." Emily Drever (for so she must be called) presented a marked and rather startling contrast to the three Misses Drever and their lady mother. She stood perfectly upright, with her body bent back as far as possible, and a self-satisfied, ill-bred smile on her face. She aped man's attire as far as she could. Her walking dress of shabby and dirty grey silk with a green spot on it, was made unusually short, and showed her not badly shaped feet, cased in thick-soled, very high heeled, buttoned leather boots. A short jacket of rough pilot cloth, double-breasted, with two pockets,

into which her hands without gloves were thrust, was drawn tightly round her, while on her large head was posed a small hat with some red roses and a bright yellow and red bird stuck in front. A goodly show of jewellery completed the toilet of this would-be fast young woman. Her look and bearing seemed to give one the impression of a silent challenge, which said as plainly as any words, "Come on now, what have you all got to say, I'm as good as you?"

It was indeed a startling apparition; no one ever recollected such a person being welcomed to Wild Wood before. May thought of what Durill and Julius would say and think. Lois at once disappeared with a mortified face, that almost provoked May into a smile. But she must stay and be introduced, not that it was a formal introduction, for, on Madam saying in a sweet voice "May, dear," May went forward with a friendly smile, and outstretched hand, which was acknowledged by the upright young person with a side-

way nod of the head. May conquered the strong desire to laugh that came over her, and as quickly as possible retreated, and left Madam, Gilbert, Judy, and the domestics to do the polite to the latest curiosity.

CHAPTER VIII.

But May was not long left in peace—in came Judy, followed immediately by Lois. Lois was burning to pour out her sentiments to someone, and had not wanted to take off her out-door garments, but throwing herself into May's easy-chair, exclaimed—

"Oh! May, had you any idea she would be like that?"

The expression on Lois's pretty face made May smile, and Judy catching the gleam of sunshine, smiled too.

"There, you two are laughing, as if the disgrace of having such a vulgar creature here was not mortifying enough."

"I cannot help it, Lois. I shall never forget

the scene in the hall while I live—it was too ludicrous," and May laughed loudly.

"Well, I shall never forget the drive nor my shame as we came through the village; we met Captain Hardwick and one of the Farqueres, and you should have seen them look. She was talking about the horses in such a fast, slang style; she said, 'The near horse has a spavin on the off leg.' May, what's that? I thought Davis would have had a fit, his face went purple, and Stephen laughed."

"I believe a spavin is some hard substance like a corn, that horses have, but I am not sure, and will ask Durill. I wonder how she knows anything about such things?"

"Oh! she appears quite a clever horsewoman from what she said. She told me how she managed her pony. 'It was such a skittish little beggar, and a buck jumper, and kicked us all out of the trap once, going to church. They sold it when I married.' I am sure I don't know

whatever we are to do with her, I am ashamed, for the servants to see and hear her. I saw Blake's look of horror when she jumped out of the carriage."

"Nor I either, Lois," said May. "If her constant and only theme is 'horses,' she had better, for the credit of the family, not attack me, because I shall be found sadly deficient. I enjoy a nice long ride on a well-trained, sensible beast, but there my acquaintance with the noble animal ceases. I have had no hair-breadth escapes, and don't want any. I shall never distinguish myself in that line. I hope she won't commence about them at dinner, or we shall have Durill's curls standing stiff like porcupine's quills."

"Indeed, I positively dread Durill and his withering scorn. He is so stern, I think I shall feign illness, and let the first evening get over without me."

"Well, Lois," said Judy, who had hitherto preserved silence, "it just serves you and mamma

quite right. You asked her against everyone's wish but Gilbert's and Crispin's; mamma even flew in the face of Durill, and I told you all plainly, when I brought the children here, the sort of mother they had. I knew mamma would be shocked when she came."

Lois looked crestfallen. There was a great deal of truth in Judy's speech—it did serve them right.

"I suppose we must make the best of it, Judy."

"Yes, I suppose so, May, but it will be a very bad best, as far as I am concerned."

"I am Miss Drever, and I cannot forget that my wishes ought to have been considered as well as Durill's. I shall appear as little as I possibly can while she is here, so you need not enquire where I am."

"Pray, Judy, don't do that, Gilbert will be so angry."

"Gilbert's anger is nothing to me, child; he

should teach his wife how to behave herself. And now, while I think of it, let me give you a piece of advice—don't propose having this person to dinner and the other."

The ever-ready tears were standing in Lois's pretty eyes, as she turned beseechingly to May. May felt pity for the childish creature.

"You are so volatile, my dear Lois, that half the trouble in our house has escaped your notice; but if I were you I would think a little more, and consult other people's wishes before my own in future."

It was now time to dress, and Lois hurried off, wondering aloud what sort of a toilet Mrs. Gilbert would make. May had promised to waylay Durill, and give him a few words of preparation before the gong sounded. Judy had begged her to do it. Accordingly when Durill's well-known heavy, measured tread echoed in the corridor, May opened her door.

"A moment, Durill, please."

"With pleasure, May, as many as you like, so long as you give me time to jump into my other togs."

"Gilbert's wife has come, Durill."

"So I am told; it is all about the stables, and from what I could gather, she is not in high repute there, either."

"Oh! Durill!"

"Yes, indeed, my dear May, it is so; another drop in our at present bitter cup. It seems that Davis was astonished at something or other, and gave it as his opinion that 'she would never hit it with Madam and the young ladies.'"

"And who told you, Durill?"

"Jinkenson."

May then told Durill Lois's story of the horse with a spavin. He laughed.

"That would be what shocked proper old Davis, no doubt. Well, Mrs. Gilbert is perfectly correct, that old horse has a slight spavin, but I should like her very much better if she knew

nothing about such things. I would not like my wife to be so learned."

"I don't fancy you will like Mrs. Gilbert, Durill."

"Indeed! And is that what you called me in here for?"

"Yes, and to tell you not to be shocked at anything."

"Excellent advice, May, and I will endeavour to follow it; at any rate I don't suppose I shall get shocked before you."

The dinner that night was anything but an agreeable meal. Mrs. Gilbert maintained a dignified silence except when spoken to, and then her answers were rudely abrupt. The amount of adornment was wonderful, and everything she had on was vulgar in the extreme. With dessert dear little Ivo was introduced; his mother had never asked for him, and no one had suggested it. He entered the room with a startled expression on his sweet countenance quite foreign to the

child, and as usual came straight to Durill and May. May took him in her arms, and kissing him said—

"There's your mamma, Ivo; run and kiss her."

It was well May told him what to do; he did it out of obedience, not love. And his mother's greeting to him was—

"Well, kid."

She did not kiss the lovely upturned face with any affection, and the boy, with a full heart, hastened back to May and Durill. May's indignation showed in her face, and Gilbert, with his own red from shame at the unnatural, unwomanly conduct of his wife, made a rambling, incoherent speech about "Some people not showing what they felt," which, as might have been expected, went off very badly. Durill took the child in his arms and turned his back to the company, and talked to the little fellow kindly till the tears had ceased to swim in the sweet eyes. Ivo did not

want to cry, and his uncle knew it, and helped the manly effort to suppress them. When the child again faced the long table he had conquered the feeling, and May well understanding how matters stood, had an apple peeled ready and raisins and other good things at hand to take his attention. His beauty might have appealed to his mother's feelings if nothing else did. He was a perfect picture. Dressed in black velvet, the knickerbockers only reaching half way down his thighs, the white silk stockings and patent leather shoes, the lace ruffles at neck, wrists, and knees, gave the boy the look of a young knight of old. His face, too, was of that stamp, and the rich chestnut hair half wavy half curly, hung in heavy masses down his back and shoulders. It was a style of dress that few children could wear; it would not have suited one in twenty. Imagine a squat, stupid, bullet-headed, snub-nosed, bent-legged little individual so attired! But with Ivo Drever it was quite different, and May's notion

of dressing him was a masterpiece of taste and art. When May had seen Ivo in bed she came down with the intention of going into the drawing-room, but at the door she met Durill coming out with his lips curled.

"Don't go in there, May, you can't stand it."

"Why not? What are they all doing?"

"Mrs. Gilbert treated us to a song, but it was so like the performance of a street singer that it set my teeth on edge; it was worse than sour plums—ugh! And the rest are working and talking nonsense."

"Is Judy there?"

"No, she does not seem smitten with her sister-in-law."

"No, she is not; for that matter I don't know who is."

The following day Julius arrived alone. Mr. Payne would come the moment he was sent for, but he declined Durill's invitation at present, not feeling well. Julius looked pale and worn;

he said he was worked too hard, and he looked it too. It put new life into the place, the sight of Julius's clever face, and Crispin seemed wonderfully amiable. Durill prepared Julius for the masculine Mrs. Gilbert, but after a bow and a short concise greeting, the barrister took no more notice of her. If the truth must be known both Durill and Julius despised the woman. The latter part of the evening was spent in the library by Durill, Julius, and May, with now and then a pop visit from Judy. The lost will was of course spoken of, and Durill related the scene with Madam in the dining-room. Julius looked very grave.

"Then, depend upon it, Gilbert will defy us, and Madam will uphold him."

"Yes, I expect that will be their game."

"And then we are left with only one resource —Chancery."

There was a dead pause after this, and then May said—

"Don't you think there will be more lost, before the suit is over, than giving Gilbert his second share?"

"No doubt there will, May, but you girls shall never be any the worse. Durill and I will mind that; but Gilbert, for his lies and schemes, shall be no better; and the only way we can prevent it is by putting the whole thing out of the reach of you all. There is not a paper to show anything, and he swears he never had that amount of money from our father. Talk about mysteries, indeed. This is one, I think."

"There is nothing else about here at present. That reminds me, Julius, have you heard anything from Moses?"

"No, May, not a word. That is another queer thing."

It was late when they left the library, for there was much to be said. It seemed to May as if all their troubles were yet to come, and those gone before counted as nothing. To sleep seemed al-

most impossible, and the fire was now inviting; but at last May got into bed, and the sleep of the weary, not of a restful mind, came to her. In the midst of a dead sleep she suddenly found herself awake—knew that she must wake. Have you ever experienced that feeling—a determination to awake before your senses had power to take in the objects round them? It is a powerful will that causes it, and I believe the will has power for almost anything short of cheating death. Such a feeling now possessed May Drever. She was sitting up in bed fast asleep, the strength of that hidden spring—the will—had got her up, and now it was struggling within her to conquer the other feelings and inclinations, and rouse the body. It seemed to cry awake! awake! and May's eyes opened and her lips said, "What is it?" Ah! that ever watchful friend was not at fault; there was a cause for May to awake, with the return of senses came a smell of burning. May sprang out of bed, uttering one word,

"Fire." Her heart almost died within her, poor girl! But she thought of her Father, "whose arm is strong to save," and her fingers were not tremulous as she undid the fastenings of the door and sped to Durill's and Julius' rooms.

"Get up, Durill, for God's sake, the house is on fire!"

And off she ran to Crispin's rooms, lower down the gallery. Something told her it was there, and she thumped at the locked door with all her strength.

In a second Durill came flying along like a gladiator (which, by the way, Kate Calvert sometimes called him), followed by Julius. But Durill did not knock; putting his shoulder against the door, he burst it open with one push of his giant body, and rushed in, followed by Julius and May.

At one glance all was understood. The window curtains, blind, valance, and toilet table arrangements were all in a blaze, and Crispin stood at-

tempting to extinguish the flames with his hands. The expression of his face told plainly what had brought it all about—brandy. The decanter stood on a side table, nearly empty. He had evidently been drinking and reading wrapped in his dressing gown, and fallen asleep over the fire. When he awoke or aroused himself and tried to get into bed, he had, in his muddled state, toppled one of the tall candles over against the hangings, and set the place in a blaze. Then there was no time to lose, and Julius and Durill seized hold of the things and tore them down, and threw water over them, which May, in full possession of her faculties, supplied them with. The noise had aroused the occupants of the corridor, that is to say, Madam, Lois, and Judy, for the visitors' and servants' rooms were at another quarter of the house, luckily, for the scene that followed was as well to be only witnessed by the family. Madam and Lois were as usual about to scream, but May stopped them.

"Hush! it is all over now; don't let us have the servants here," said she, turning to them dripping wet.

"Oh, heavens! how did it happen?" inquired Madam, with clasped hands.

"Happen!" ejaculated Durill, wheeling round with a jug in his hand, and his face white with passion. "Happen, indeed! Through this drunken besotted beast!" glancing at Crispin, who stood the picture of a softy, with the most imbecile expression on his good-looking face, blowing on his burnt fingers. "You fool you, I have a good mind to shake the teeth out of your head, or pitch you through the window!"

The exasperated man, shaking with rage, who stood towering over Crispin in his trousers and shirt, looked very like doing it, seeing which Madam slided to his side, and stayed him.

"No, no, Durill, my son, don't—pray don't—consider—"

"Yes, Madam, I do consider," replied the deep voice, "that but for May there we should have all been burnt in our beds, or pretty near it. You see for yourself the state he is in—half drunk, and that decanter speaks for itself. Out of this house you go to-morrow, sir; you shall set somebody else's place on fire, not mine."

"Well, this is a pretty fine go," said Julius, surveying the room, which was almost swimming in water, for he and Durill had gone to work with a will. The glass and scent bottles, and other small fry, lay a heap of ruins, the paper and ceiling were burnt as black as a hat, every pane of glass in the window smashed, and the place a complete ruin. "Better get someone to mop this up, it will soon be through to the under room; the carpet, thick as it is, cannot hold out much longer."

Julius's advice was excellent, and Judy set off to get Blake up, and some of the others.

"You had better clear out of here, sir, before the servants come and see the state you're in," said Durill, sternly.

Crispin got up from the chair into which he had fallen, and immediately fell against his mother, who stood regarding him most sorrowfully.

"Oh, Crispin! Crispin!"

"Was—the—mather—dear smother?" asked the hopeful son, in a voice so unlike his own that Lois burst into tears, and recoiled from him. Julius half smiled at the girl's face of astonishment and horror. It was the first time she had ever seen anyone screwed.

"Better take him with you, mother," said Julius.

And Madam, drawing his arm through hers, and asking Judy, who just came back that moment, to do the same at the other side, did as Julius suggested, and took the specimen to her own rooms, where she consigned him to a sofa, there to sleep off the effects of too much brandy.

As they disappeared the clocks chimed one.

May could not have been in bed a quarter of an hour before she smelt the fire. She was shivering with cold and terror; she had kept her senses in the time of danger, but now came the reaction. Durill came to her; his face was still white, but all trace of anger had flown.

"May, dearest, you are soaking; go to your room, and I will bring you some hot negus. It is enough to make you ill."

"Yes, Durill, I will go; I hear Blake coming."

And May turned. At the door, just on the mat, she observed a letter, and, picking it up, saw it was directed to Julius. "Ah," thought she, "it has tumbled out of his pocket in the general scrimmage." But she did not care to re-enter the room to give it to him, because Blake's grey head was just visible, and May did not know who might be after him, so she made the best of her way to her room.

CHAPTER IX.

"THAT you, Blake? Come in."

"Yes, Mr. Durill. The Lord have mercy on us! what's all this?" exclaimed the old man, standing stock still in the doorway.

"Why, Blake, we have all had a narrow escape. Your fear in connection with the brandy bottle has come true; Mr. Crispin has set the room on fire, and but for Miss May, who awoke and smelt it, the place would in all probability have been burnt to the ground, and us in it."

"Aye, Mr. Durill, sir, I am afraid things are bad with those two gentlemen. Drink is a safe road to ruin, and I made bold to speak to them about it when they ordered the brandy to their rooms each night, and Mr. Gilbert he was angry."

"What's that?" asked Julius. "Does Gilbert take brandy to bed with him?"

"Yes, Mr. Julius, and I fancy it was him as learnt Mr. Crispin the habit."

"Well, I'm glad, for the first time, Mrs. Gilbert is here, because I don't suppose she will submit to the cooking process; at any rate she won't be quiet over it, and we may be able to put it out like this. But it is not safe, and if I were you, Durill, I'd make them clear out."

"I intend to, Julius; this piece of business has put the finishing touch to my resolution. It is a perfect disgrace, without speaking of the danger."

"Yes, Mr. Durill, it is; I wonder what my dear master would say? This must be mopped up, and I'll take this away before they come, and then they won't get talking in the servants' hall. They have been doing that fast enough lately."

The old man took the decanter, but turned round in the doorway to ask—

"Don't you think you had better have a little something hot, gentlemen? Your shirt sleeves and fronts is both wet."

"Perhaps so, Blake," replied Durill, feeling his great arms; "and that reminds me I wish you would get Miss May hot wine and water, she was soaking with carrying and filling the jugs?"

"Dear me; and Miss May with her cough too;" and Blake rushed off with the brandy in his hand to May's room, the door of which, in answer to his thumps, she opened.

"My dear Miss May, is your fire out? Let old Blake see," said he, popping his head into the dressing-room. "Not quite—that's lucky. I shall leave this here while I get some water and wine for you. The gentlemen will want something. The Lord has been good to us this night, Miss May."

"Yes, indeed, Blake, we have great reason to be thankful."

"That we have," replied the faithful old

fellow, putting a scuttle full of coals on the fire. "Now just you get well warmed, young lady. Mr. Durill tells me you were dripping wet."

May laughed.

"Yes, I was; the jugs were so heavy, I could scarcely fill them at the baths, but I put other gowns on directly."

Blake departed, leaving May at the fire in the cosy little room, and sent some of the servants to Crispin's room to mop it, while he went to get hot water for May.

There was no thought of sleep at present; and Durill and Julius sat themselves down comfortably before May's cheerful little fire. Blake having mixed each something to prevent them catching cold, bade them a respectful good night, and shut the door. There was a pause; each had a secret thought, a silent prayer in their hearts. The danger, now that it was past, seemed greater than it did during the time of action.

Julius was the first to touch upon the cord vibrating in each heart.

"A few minutes more, and we should never have got it out. I have burnt my hands too."

"So have I," said Durill; "but that's not a serious matter. Were you awake, May, that you were so prompt in acting?"

"No; I was in bed and asleep; though only a very short time, but I was awakened in a curious manner, a feeling took me that I must wake, and I then smelt the burning, and guessed what it was directly, for I have never been easy since you told me, Durill."

"And no wonder, dear; but I had no idea Crispin would take so much; he was perfectly incapable of doing anything. I should think his hands are in a nice state, but no doubt his mother has bound them in cambric handkerchiefs, and soothed his feelings."

"His mother ought to be ashamed of herself," said Julius; "but I doubt not she will have

enough to do with the 'sweet boy' before long."

"Oh! Julius, before I forget," said May, putting her hand into the pocket in her dressing-gown, "here is a letter I picked up at the door of Crispin's room. I suppose you dropped it in the scuffle."

She handed him the letter at once, and he, looking at it, exclaimed—

"Why, May, where did this come from; it is one of those letters!"

"What letters?"

"Moses' letter; this is Moses' fist, I'll swear."

"Nonsense, Julius; I have those letters safely locked in the bill drawer in the snuggery."

"But this is the same writing?"

"Well, read the letter, it is open; but I did not look at it, only to see your name on it, and that in an uncertain light."

Julius took the letter out of the envelope, which was again on half a sheet of common

paper, and read the contents in a petrified tone of voice—

"I agree to postpone proceedings at your request for the space of one month, but not a day after.

"MOSES."

The three stared at each other in wonder and amazement. Then the truth dawned upon Julius, who with a smothered oath exclaimed—

"I see it now, the scamp."

"What, Julius?" asked May, in terror. "Surely never—"

The words died away on May's lips, and her face turned ghastly.

"Yes it is, May; that's the truth sure enough."

"What—what?" impatiently asked Durill, with his eyes wide open. "What are you both talking about?"

"This," and Julius hissed the words through his shut teeth; "Crispin has forged my name."

The horror that crept over the three prevented utterance; the white faces looked in blank astonishment and horror at each other, and at last Durill breathed in a deep guttural tone—

"My God, how awful!"

"Yes, and to think not one of us ever thought of it before," said May. "Do you recollect the last letter that came, Julius, and when you exclaimed about it openly at table Crispin dropped his cup of coffee? Then Judy and Ivo saw him running across the fields to the station, and Lois said he was at the Rectory. I saw him come in at night, and he was not in dinner dress."

"Yes—yes, I understand it now. This letter was written on the 11th and stamped here on the 12th, a day before I came; so the scoundrel must have watched for the letters, and suppressed this. It just shows how 'Murder will out;' he sets fire to his room, and we go in to put it out, and find the letter."

"What are you going to do, Julius?"

"Worm the truth out of him, I suppose, Durill, stop Mr. Moses' mouth, and hush it up. It is an everlasting blast. Forgery! it is the next crime to murder, and to have one's own brother do it."

Durill rocked himself about in anguish; it was an awful thing. A Drever guilty of forgery, and with a brother made it doubly bad. One thing was uppermost in Durill's mind, a feeling of thankfulness that his father had not lived to witness the disgrace. They did not think of sleep, but sat planning how the secret of their brother's crime could be best kept from the knowledge of the world. The family must know, because Crispin must be got off to seek his fortune in foreign lands.

"But he has not passed, Durill," said May; "he is not qualified for a doctor."

"He must go as assistant, or anything he can, May."

"And supposing he won't?"

"Then I shall make a public example of him, though he is my brother," said Julius. "It is not safe. God only knows how we are to get out of this, for there is sure to be a terrific sum of money to pay. Those Jews are not lenient excepting in a great catch, and when they feel sure of their safety."

"Then this Moses is a money-lender, I presume?"

"Yes, May, that no doubt is his calling, and a rascally one it is too. Heaven help anyone that gets into the hands of an Israelite money-changer, it is like catching a bird in a net, there is no place large enough to let them get out. But what can Crispin have been about to need money?"

"Leading a fast life at College, of course."

Durill then told of the money he had foolishly supplied him with; and, lastly, his letter to his father, asking what he might expect at his death. The letter that had been such a fearful blow to the poor single-hearted old Squire.

Julius, after hearing all these details seemed less inclined than ever to show mercy or forbearance. But then there was the family credit to be kept up.

"I wonder if Gilbert has had a finger in this pie?"

"Very likely," said Durill.

"Well, we shall know soon, for I intend to have the truth out of Crispin before many hours. I came down to try and settle affairs peaceably; I had no idea it would turn to forgery."

A few more words, and they separated to try and get a short sleep. But it was an impossibility; who could sleep after such a discovery? May sat on, thinking—thinking, till the fire got too low to afford any warmth. It seemed as if all their troubles were to come. Yes, truly, "King Hop" was a bird of ill omen.

The meeting at breakfast was a strange one. Only Crispin was absent; he kept his room—ill, so report said. Durill took no breakfast; only

some coffee, and said nothing. There was something weighing heavily on those three brave hearts, and it seemed to spread its influence to all the others. Perhaps they thought it was the fire; and when Durill and Julius sought Crispin's room, Madam tried to stop them.

"Durill, be merciful; where will the poor fellow go to? It was not his fault—he has told me all about it. He was not well last night, and took some brandy, thinking to ease himself. It must have taken great effect upon the poor boy, which is often the case with sick people, and he is so sorry. He must have exerted himself most bravely to get the fire under, for his poor hands are in a shocking state. Don't send him away, Durill; I will pay all expenses in his room?"

Madam pleaded earnestly for her scampish son, and Durill would fain have spared her. Her ignorance touched his heart. It is pitiful when children take to lieing and deceiving their parents. Julius and Durill looked at each other; who was

going to tell the mother what her son had done?

"Mother," said Durill, kindly looking down at the pretty weak woman clinging to his arm; "don't plead any more; you don't know whom you are pleading for; your son must leave this house, and this country. Don't ask any questions, I would rather spare you; what you want to know you must ask him. But I promise you I will be as kind and lenient as my indignation will allow me, and do my best for him; not for his sake, but for his father's and yours."

"Durill—Durill, what is to do; what are you hinting at?"

Madam's face was stricken, and pained as she looked at the grave man.

"Nay, nay, mother, I told you not to ask; trust me, if you can, to act for you this time. But my hands shall never be the ones to pull the screen down that hides your son's sins and faults

from your eyes. And now I must see Crispin, mother; so don't detain me."

Madam saw Durill was not to be moved, so she next tried Julius.

"No, mother," said that individual, putting up his hands to keep her off; "it is no use, I am not so tender hearted as Durill, or so amiable."

And Madam was obliged to desist, and let them pass on their way to Crispin. Julius had the three epistles in his pocket, and he fully intended to make Crispin talk that time, if he never did again. The smell of burning was still strong throughout that end of the house. The fire had caused quite a sensation, but no one guessed that it was owing to Crispin's being drunk. It was spoken of as "an accident" and "a providential escape." Gilbert seemed rather silent, and frequently passed his white hand over his smooth face. He had shaved off his moustache, which did not improve him; so, at

Madam's urgent request, he was again letting it grow.

He looked at Durill sheepishly; no doubt too well judging that he knew the true cause of the fire. Durill and Julius found Crispin in Madam's boudoir, reclining on a couch, and Lois at his side reading to him. He wore a georgeous dressing-gown of either his own or his doating mother's; while his hands—those womanly white hands—were tenderly wrapped in cotton wool and cambric handkerchiefs. They were pretty severely burnt; as a natural consequence from his having used them too freely in the flames. He turned pale when Durill and Julius entered, and white when Julius said—

"Lois, you are wanted down stairs," and held the door open for her.

This young lady did not quite like being banished in so quick a style, but the fire had tamed her even, so with the best grace she could muster she obeyed the command and went, upon

which Julius immediately locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. Durill was not astonished at this piece of business, for Julius's dark face had a tinge of red under the pale skin that denoted determination coupled with anger. When he made up his mind, he would not be deterred from accomplishing his purpose; he was like a tiger when roused, and when a lad at school and engaged in fights, his enemy stood a good chance of being torn limb from limb, if no one interfered. This passion had of course been subdued, but even now nothing was an impossibility to Julius, and the expression of his intelligent face, as he put the key in his pocket, told of the roused anger held well in hand, and the determination to get the truth out of Crispin. Crispin looked extremely uneasy, and turning to Durill, who had taken up his stand on the hearth-rug, he said—

"I suppose you are down upon me on account of last night's work, Durill? But really I have

been so ill lately, that my doctor told me never to go to bed without some brandy in the room, and when I felt the least symptom of an attack take some—"

"I should fancy your doctor to be the devil, Crispin; and follow his directions by all means if you like, only not in my house. Angry though I am at the disgraceful piece of business you perpetrated last night, and the danger you exposed us all to, it has sunk almost into insignificance before a more terrible discovery which the fire enabled us to make. Julius will explain all to you (though from your face I deem no explanation necessary), as it concerns him more than anyone else."

During Durill's short speech Crispin's face had lost all trace of colour, and his expression was that of abject misery. His head sank on his breast, and for a second he looked the picture of a craven coward. But his friend and ally, the devil, was nigh and rallied his drooping courage,

so he raised his head with a jerk, and asked, in the most impertinent manner—

"What business they had to interfere with him?"

"I have business; though I heartily wish I had not," said Julius, feeling in his pocket. "Do you know that writing, Crispin?"

Crispin glanced at the hideous scrawl, and composedly replied—

"No, can't say that I do; odd fist, though."

"No lies, Crispin; you know this writing only too well, and also that these three epistles are intended for you, though addressed to me."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the kind, Julius; a likely tale—what next pray?"

"Then how came this letter in your possession last night? How did it come to be secured and opened on the 12th, and I not here? You opened it, Crispin, knowing it to be your letter, and it was found in your room last night."

"It was nothing of the kind; it is not my

letter, and I know nothing about it; and if you are in a fix don't try to palm it on me, because it won't do—mind that."

The "mind that" was accompanied by a nod of the head, given in a most impudent, knowing sort of style, which had the merit of putting the overflowing drop to Julius's accumulated wrath. He had fast been getting up to boiling point, for Crispin's barefaced lies were rather too much of a good thing, but it would have simmered down, no doubt, but for that nod; that unfortunate nod turned the scale. In a second Julius was up and in a blind fury knocked Crispin off the couch with a stinging blow.

"I say, Julius, old fellow, don't let us have a row," said Durill, coolly, as Crispin, white to the very lips, and muttering curses volubly, slowly gathered himself up.

"No, Durill, we'll have no row, and I ought not to have struck him; but to hear a fellow sit there and tell lies by the bushel, with a smile on

his face, is more than I can stand. I have struck you once, Crispin, and I shall strike you again, and hammer you to pulp, but I'll have the truth out of you—you barefaced, lying scoundrel. You are not content with forging my name in some disreputable trick, but actually deny it flatly; deny all knowledge of the very letter that convicts you, with a face as innocent as a girl's. Mind, I'll have the truth; if you won't tell it quietly I'll beat it out of your body like a dog; but I'll make you speak, or I'll well nigh kill you—brother though you are. I could treat you as a felon, and have the truth that way, but I don't want to disgrace your family more if possible; besides, the law is too good for a devil like you, so I will try the beating first, and if that won't make you speak, the law after. Now, are you ready?"

Crispin gave one glance round the room, and then at Durill; there was no chance of escape, and not the least probability of mercy. Durill

seemed there on purpose to see justice done; not to show mercy. Crispin saw this; he read what he might expect in the faces of the two men; he was caught in a trap, and all his courage and bravado vanished; his head still tingled from the last blow, and he saw plenty more in prospect by the light in Julius's eyes and set mouth, so he resolved to spare his body and turn king's evidence.

His judges saw the white flag was hoisted, by the scared face and hanging jaw. His one cry now was for mercy, and he would confess everything; he was as tractable as a child. There was a something so repulsive in the cringing coward, in the way he implored them to screen him and have mercy, that Durill and Julius drew back in horrified disgust at the kneeling wretch grovelling at their feet like a whipped hound.

CHAPTER X.

"SILENCE, and get up, sir," said Durill, "and tell the truth, if you know how."

He did so, trembling in every limb, and the cold drops of perspiration standing like beads on his forehead. Julius was not so angry now, and he commenced his examining in a kindly tone; his anger was spent, and he had obtained his object—namely, that of making Crispin speak.

"Now, Crispin, tell your story truthfully, mind, and all of it. I could ask you questions to draw the answers, but I don't care to; and you are my brother, God help you! and I won't be too hard. But if you cross me, or tell any more lies, I shall break the bond of brotherhood, and treat you as the law directs a felon should be treated."

There was scarcely need for one more threat. Crispin was thoroughly cowed, and fully intended telling the truth, so sinking into a chair, and clasping the burnt hands in misery, he began—

"Julius, have mercy; don't be hard, you said you would not—screen me; think how it would grieve my mother! I will tell you the truth, indeed I will.

"Some time ago I got into debt in various forms, but principally debts of honour. The allowance my father made me I could not make do. I had to keep a horse and go on like the rest of my friends, and I was always in arrears. But at last I got into a scrape over cards, and the money had to be paid, or I should have been kicked out of the club and hooted. I was in an awful state; I dare not apply to the Squire, and at last I went, by the advice of a friend, to a Jew money-lender, Moses. I told him how much I wanted, and who I was. He seemed to know the Drevers by name, and also that they were a

good old family (a deep groan from Durill), for he did not make much ado, and agreed to lend me the money. But he must have security from two people that the money should be paid as it became due. My friend that recommended me to him did for one, and for the other I forged the name of Julius Drever. Old Moses was perfectly satisfied. I got the money, and saved my credit. I was then at my wits' end how to meet the instalments and keep the secret. I wrote to him in your name from here, telling him to address always here instead of the Temple, and being at home at the times when I knew he would write I got all the letters but those two. I got money from Durill once and mother, and stopped his mouth for a time, and then wrote now and again in your name and got him to wait; it was not very difficult to manage, because he knew the money was safe. I bribed Steel, the postman, when he sorted the letters to keep out of the Wild Wood bag all letters addressed to you in

Moses' hand, which he did, with the exception of those two, and the devil must have had a finger in that. It was to send a telegram to Moses that I took that mysterious ride and killed May's Gipsy; and when you got the last letter, and spoke of it at the table, I went to London that day, and Judy was correct about seeing me running across the fields to the station; I did go, though I told Lois a lie, and said I was off to the Rectory that night. That is all the truth; I have told everything, and for God's sake have mercy on me!"

Crispin had told the story as quickly as possible, and seemed relieved when he came to the end. He had kept his eyes on the carpet the whole time, never once looking at the two mournful men opposite him. Durill and Julius were as white as ghosts, and Durill leant his broad shoulders against the mantelpiece, with his arms folded across his chest, the picture of sorrowful misery. The disgrace weighed heavily upon him. Julius

gazed at Crispin with mixed feelings, and bit his lips in anger. And well he might; he had placed him in the power of a money-lender, which was the most undesirable of all things, and damned the name of Drever for life. If he had got the money from some respectable person it would not have been so hard, but he had got into the hands of one of the greatest and lowest scamps. Crispin never offered to speak; he sat with his head bowed down, like a criminal waiting for sentence to be passed. Julius moved, and looked at Durill, who, in return, shook his head, as much as to say, "Do what you like."

"Crispin, you have not told this Moses' full name and place of abode?"

"Did I not?" said Crispin, absently raising his eyes for the first time, and speedily letting them drop again.

"His name is Levi Moses, and he lives at No. 3, Goldfinch Lane."

"And what was the sum you got from him?"

"Nearly six hundred, and I have paid scarcely any interest, so that it will be about eight hundred, I fancy."

Julius stared in mute wonderment at Crispin, but it had all to be told. His lip quivered slightly as he addressed the scheming young scamp before him.

"Crispin, you have done that for which I can never forgive you; but for the sake of your dead father, who was a good old man and a gentleman in every sense of the word, I will not be hard. You must leave this matter in my hands, and Durill and I will act for the best, and try and save the name of Drever further disgrace. I beg you to keep your own counsel, and remain in this room; you are said to be ill, and you can keep so for a few days, while we arrange matters. We will not expose you if you do as I advise; and now let me ask, has Gilbert any knowledge of this transaction; had he any hand in the business?"

"No, Julius; I swear he has not; he knows nothing about it."

"I am glad of that, and I charge you not to tell him; and now who was the man who went joint security with the supposed Julius Drever?"

"Alfred Rolland; the son of Colonel Rolland, Grenadier Guards."

"What, that scoundrel? He has not twopence to call his own; and he went security. Oh, a nice piece of business; he knew he had nothing to lose, and it would all devolve on me. Did he put you up to forging my name?"

"No, indeed, he did not; it was entirely my own doing, but Moses would not take Rolland as security alone."

"Not likely, either; the taking him at all was merely a catch, and to have a greater hold on me. There will be nothing of Colonel Rolland's property for his son; the sharks are only waiting for the old man's death, to grab it. Let me see

how you write my name. Put down 'Julius Drever, Temple Court.'"

Crispin did so with a flush on his fair face, and Julius caught it up. It was exactly his own writing; there was every little twist and loop; not one turned the wrong way; every letter precisely like his own. He handed it to Durill, who almost started when he saw it; he could have sworn it was Julius's writing. It is supposed to be a great gift—the possession of a correct eye; but it had been better if Crispin Drever had been born blind. Julius took the paper, and, holding it to the flames, said—

"Crispin, this will be the last time you will ever need to write my name; see, I burn it, and I wish to God I could burn your sin with it."

Crispin's head was bent in shame, and, without addressing him again, his brothers left the room, and the miserable young man to his thoughts.

All this time May had sat in the snuggery suffering agony; it was but one hour, but to her

it seemed three. Her sense of right and wrong was keen, and her misguided brother's crime stood out clear before her in letters of blood. The house was very quiet; and May sat listening for Durill's well-known tread. Gilbert and his wife, accompanied by Lois, had gone out, and Ivo had liberty that morning. May could not bear to hear his innocent chatter—let alone attend to his studies. Her mind was too unsettled, and her hands and head felt burning hot; she had taken cold notwithstanding Blake's glass of hot stuff. Presently footsteps came along, and stopped at the snuggery door; the handle turned, and Durill and Julius entered. May's face asked the question her lips could not utter, and Durill, throwing himself into a chair, answered it.

"Yes, May, he is guilty; he has confessed everything. Of all the well arranged plots I ever heard this is the best; the devil is an excellent teacher."

Gradually May was made aware of the entire

story, Durill acting as spokesman, while Julius sat leaning his arm on the table in deep thought. It was a horrible scene that interview in the snuggery, and it was a difficult matter to tell which of the three felt it the most deeply.

"Does he seem sorry, Durill?"

"I really can't say, May, dear; but if I may state my opinion, I don't believe he is. His one idea is how best to be screened, and he is more frightened than penitent. The bother then was to get him to own to it or speak; at first he denied it flatly, and with such an impudent face; I verily believe that but for Julius's determination to hammer him till he did speak he would never have confessed."

"Very likely not; and no doubt he expected to pay the Jew with his share, and that was his reason for writing to papa to know his expectations."

"Well, that is all over, for there will be no division, at least not at present; and the subject

to be considered now is how to pay this Levi Moses?"

"Julius, I will pay the money and save the name," said Durill. "I will give you the money, and you pay it and hush the matter up?"

"Nay, Durill, old fellow," replied Julius, smiling; "we will go shares and screen the lad, devil though he is. It would not do to say he forged my name, so I will square up with Moses without loss of time. It is an awful lump though; he has made Crispin pay through the nose for what he got, but that is their way."

"Yes, it is. What on earth Crispin can have done with all the money he has had is a mystery to me. But one thing is clear, he cannot go back to Oxford. I will pay no expenses after this discovery. He must be got out of the country, or we shall have him at the same dodge again. And where to send him to?"

Julius considered a few minutes, and then said—

"I have a friend out at Port Jackson. It is a

great resort for invalids, especially those in consumption, and possibly Crispin could get something to do in his own line, and if not, Hind would give him something to do in his office, or at least see to him, and it would be better than sending him to a perfectly strange land, without a single friend?"

"Yes, it would vastly, and I shall see about it. Are you going into town, to-day, Julius?"

"Yes, by the half-past twelve train; can I have a trap to run me down, Durill?"

"Certainly, you may have any you choose, but I am going myself, and shall be happy to give you a seat in my dog cart."

"Thanks, and will you come to this Jew's with me, I want to settle with the old Judas?"

"Yes, after I have been to the Bank."

Julius said he had a word to say to Crispin, and ran up the stairs, not from lightness of heart, but from haste. In the corridor he met Madam with a scared white face, a face that looked so

stricken in its woe, that Julius involuntarily came to a stand.

"Why, mother, what is it?"

"Hush! hush! Julius," said the poor creature, catching her breath painfully, "*he* has told me all, all he did, everything. Oh! Julius, listen to me, I beseech you, have mercy; he deceived me, he has deceived us all; but spare him, Julius, he is my youngest boy, *don't* punish him?"

"So he has told you himself? Well, I am glad of it. Be at rest, mother, I am not going to punish him; I shall set him clear this afternoon if possible. But he must go away, mother; Durill and I will do the best we can for him, but he must go and shift for himself in another land!"

"Oh, Julius, would you banish him?"

"Yes, mother, it is his only chance; then all and everyone will be strange to him, and if there *is* anything in him it will come out, and he may learn to be a better man; but keep him here and

God alone knows what he would be after next. I regret to say it to you, mother, but Crispin is a very hardened sinner, and no wonder, after all these years of screening, pampering, and spoiling. He is just a second Gilbert, you have had a hand in making them both what they are. You know that old proverb 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' But I can't stay talking here, or I shall lose the train, so you must just leave Crispin to us, mother, and we will do our best for him. If you keep the secret so will we, no one need know the real truth of the case; and now I'm off."

Julius was considerate enough to his mother, though it was her doing that caused all the misery; but it was not Julius's nature to rake up old grievances. The word to Crispin was soon said, and Julius did not keep Durill waiting when the dog cart was ready.

A cab took them to the end of Goldfinch Lane; then they alighted, and pushed their way down the dark, dirty, dismal place. Many of the

houses were empty, and those that were tenanted presented a most forlorn appearance. Not the sign of a curtain; and the first window of each house was frosted half way up. Most of the inhabitants were Jews, working jewellers, money changers, furniture buyers, pedlars, and dealers in almost everything.

There was a deadness about the scene, as if each house was empty, or too much engaged to think of play. One or two Israelitish children, extremely dirty and untidy, were amusing themselves in the gutter, and quarrelling over the possession of a broken toy, as Durill and Julius passed along. A good way up this lane, on the left side, was a double house, with a plate on the door bearing the name of Moses. At this door the Drevers stopped, and Durill dealt the old door such a thump with the knocker that it made the lane echo again, and two or three top windows opened, and female heads appeared decorated with curl papers. It was not a little

surprise to them to see from where the sound proceeded; for Mr. Moses' visitors were, as a rule, pretty quiet, and generally paid their respects to him in the dusk. But these two handsome men held their heads high, and appeared to be taking stock of the place in a decidedly disgusted manner.

Durill threw back his broad shoulders, exclaiming—

"What a stuffy hole; I feel as if I could not breathe!"

Julius smiled, and prepared for another attack on the door, when the sound of shuffling feet arrested his hand.

A bolt was slipped, and the door opened about an inch, while a voice, evidently coming through the nose, asked, "What do you want?"

"I want to see Levi Moses, who lives here, and be so kind as to tell him so, for I am pressed for time."

In answer to this speech of Julius's the door

opened wider, and displayed a boy of about ten, of small stature. His head was large enough for two, and covered with black, matted locks; his nose and lips met, and his eyes were coal black, and deeply set. It was one of the most cunning faces possible; the child had evidently been well tutored, and the small eyes took stock of the two men before him at a glance. He shuffled off to a door on the right of the filthy passage, and, bobbing his head in, shouted in a shrill voice, "wanted."

Durill and Julius were now alone in a room which was made half its proper size by a portion being partitioned off; there was not a vestige of furniture in the wretched place, and the boards were as black as coals. They stood for a second, and Julius, turning to Durill, whispered—

"The imp has gone, we shall have the old gentleman next."

Julius's prediction proved correct; a door in the partition opened, and out came a diminutive,

deformed figure. The face, which displayed the wiliness of the devil, was distorted into a grin, which showed a few yellow and black fangs stuck at intervals in the rotten old gums. The clothes, hanging upon the old bag of bones, were literally in pieces; they would not have borne the process of removing, and it was clear they answered the purpose by night as well as day. His locks were getting white, or at least as white as oil and filth would allow them to get, and fell over his back and round his shoulders. His face was shaved, and presented a greasy, bluish black appearance. In truth, grease predominated in that house; the one odour was that of concentrated essence of fat; and the closer the hideous figure got to them, the stronger became the smell. He advanced with a sideway sort of motion, rubbing his long yellow, skinny hands together in the most oily manner. His head reached to about the second button on Durill's waistcoat, and Durill looked down on

him in horror and disgust. Whatever they had been prepared for, they had not been prepared for this. The object before them was a perfect monstrosity; and this monstrosity was none other than Levi Moses, the money lender. When quite close to them he asked, in a harsh tone, at the same time emitting quantities of saliva—

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, shentlemen?"

"Show us into your office," said Julius.

The hideous old man slided off towards the partition and invited them in.

Here the fumes of opium were stronger. It was just a small room, with a fireplace in it, a desk, one or two iron safes, and a stool; but it was well enough furnished for Levi Moses and for those who came to see him. Some of the highest in the land had sat down on those safes, and if that dirty little box of a room could have spoken, it could have related queer scenes and deeds.

Briefly and plainly Julius explained their errand, and what they wanted doing.

The Jew looked rather displeased at having the matter settled, and offered to renew the bill for any length of time. But no, it must be settled; so the Jew set to work casting up the interest, Julius keeping pace with him. At last it was done, and the total set down—783 pounds.

A proper receipt was got from the old Judas, and all the papers burnt, so that nothing could ever be shown in days to come.

Julius did not tell Levi Moses that his name was a forgery, he let it pass. The old man bowed and rubbed his hands when he had the seven hundred and eighty-three pounds before him, and wished "all shentlemens would be so punctual." The old villain saw he had got all he would ever get from either of the two men in his office, so he would part friends with them. He did not like Julius's shrewdness. He told them how hard it was for him to make a living, and what a poor

man he was; but how he strove for the sake of his boy Ishmael—he would show them that boy, and, shuffling along the dark passage, called out "Ishmael, my son! Ishmael! come down to thy father!"

There was a pause, and then came the answer, in a voice very like that of the imp's—

"Go to the devil."

Old Moses came back to them to the door.

"Nish boy, shentlemen, very nish boy Ishmael."

"Very," replied Durill and Julius, stepping out, and taking their last look of the hideous face of old Levi Moses.

CHAPTER XI.

ONCE more in the cab Durill heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Thank God that is over—and we must get over the loss, Julius, as well as we can. I never hope to set my foot in Goldfinch Lane again;—of all the dens and of all the devils, it is that old Moses and his house. I should say he is one of the lowest of his set."

"Yes, he is; Crispin could not have got into worse hands. Thank heaven, we have got him out, and the next thing to be done is to get him abroad. I shall write to Hind to-night—there is a mail on the 20th—and tell him enough of the story to account for Crispin's appearance, should he go. But his mother does not wish to part

with him. I am sorry for her, Durill. I don't know when I saw anyone so stricken—poor thing."

"Aye, indeed it is 'poor thing,' but she is only now reaping what she sowed years ago, and still continues to sow. Father always said that Gilbert's conduct was partly owing to his mother's teaching, and I am sure it is correct; those two fellows have been made such gods of by their fond mother because they were good looking and like the Bentons, that their few senses dwindled to nothing before the amount of conceit that sprang up, and then they take to slippery tricks and dodging. But we will have an end of Crispin's tricks: abroad he must go whether his mother likes it or not, and that I shall tell her."

"She knows it already, for I told her. No, I don't fancy there will be any serious objection made; Crispin's confession seems to have opened her eyes pretty freely."

Crispin kept his room for a week, and then

came down for the last two days; he was going to Port Jackson. The fretting had all been got over by Lois and Madam, but Madam looked sad enough, and could not bear him out of her sight. Durill and Julius managed everything, and it was given out as Crispin's desire to go. Indeed, Crispin did wish to go, for there was no probability of either Durill or Julius defraying his College expenses after settling with Moses, and the division could not be made because Gilbert declared he would have his share, so there was nothing for it but Chancery, and Crispin must go and do for himself. His brothers were behaving very kindly to him, they paid all his debts and expenses out, and gave him a good round sum in his pocket. After that he must work at whatever he could. They set him free, and it would be his own fault if he got again netted. His fond mother would have liked to keep him, and there was something very touching in the way she looked at her boy, and stroked

his yellow locks that last day together. They might never meet again, and it was a bitter parting. Julius and May were busy seeing after the last things to be done in the snuggery; Durill was at the Cavendishes.

"There, Julius, that is the last package," said May, laying it on the table, sealed. "I wonder what Edith Anderton says to Crispin going?"

"Can't say, my dear. I know what she would have said though, if his destination had been Norfolk Island, instead of Port Jackson. Just push the lamp a trifle nearer, May, it is getting awfully low."

"Yes, it wants oil, or wick, or something; I must tell James. Things seem to have got all wrong lately."

"Yes, but we must hope they will right themselves soon."

By the early train, Durill, Julius, and Crispin went to Plymouth; they were going to see Crispin off. The good-bye was hurriedly spoken,

and the last Madam saw of her darling boy was his handsome face at the carriage window, waving a last adieu. "The Good Intent" sailed at eight that night, and the close of evening was nigh as the good ship spread her white sails and floated out to sea.

There were plenty of passengers on board, crying and waving their handkerchiefs to their friends; but at one side stood a young man looking fixedly at a small boat that was leaving the ship, with two handsome, dark men in it; the biggest man is standing up, and shouting a last "Good-bye, lad." It is a kindly, cheery, hopeful voice, and it comes bowling along the green waves, and falls on the ear of the young man leaning over the side. He knows the voice, and, with perhaps the last remnant of pure feeling comes the recollection of that home nestling amidst the woods and hills, which may be he will never see again; that home of affection and comfort from which he had banished himself,

and then the remembrance of that good old man his father, whom only so short a time before he had seen consigned to his last resting-place, under the shadows of the grey old church. Aye! thank God! he raises his hat and stands with bared head, and a tear glistening in each eye. The night-wind sports with his yellow locks, the locks his mother was so fond of stroking. Let us leave him; there, on his way to a strange land, an outcast and alone, comes a still small voice whispering in his ear "Repent, repent." He can't shut it out, the last streak of twilight settles itself far over the wide ocean in a little patch of light; still he stands there, with the little voice doing its work—still the old sailor sings a low, mournful ditty, as he furls the ropes—and the "Good Intent" sails on, bearing at least *one* aching heart.

There was a great calm for a day or two after Crispin's departure; Madam was ill, and kept her room. Little Ivo had been left very much

to himself lately, on account of May's time being so occupied, and he consequently saw rather more of his mother than May could have desired. The effect was soon evident in the child; he did not get on with his mother, she worried and irritated the spirited boy, and provoked him to rebellion. Then she exerted her authority, and a scene ensued. When Parker told May of this, she was much annoyed, and said Ivo should not have another morning's liberty if she could possibly help it, for it was during the mornings that all the mischief happened; there were no drives or walks going on perhaps, and Mrs. Gilbert amused herself with her pretty boy.

"Indeed, Miss May, I am glad you say so, for I dread Mr. Gilbert will keep his promise."

"What promise was that, Parker?"

"Why, Miss May, I actually heard him tell Master Ivo that he would beat him the next time he dared to disobey his mamma!"

The girl's face was scarlet, and May's caught the infection.

"I think not, Parker; there must have been some misunderstanding, for Master Ivo is a particularly obedient child."

"That's what I said, Miss May, and Mrs. Gilbert told me to 'hold my tongue.'"

"I am afraid she does not quite understand her little boy, so we had better keep them apart."

May left the nursery and the indignant Parker, with a tumult of feelings at work in her breast. She would not have Ivo beaten; it would break the child's spirit. Nothing is so injurious and hurtful to a sensitive, high-spirited boy as to be whipped like a dog; they never forget it. There are some natures that can only be appealed to by means of a thick stick; but those who are fond of inflicting corporeal punishment should mind they get a fit subject. But Ivo's punishment came sooner than May anticipated.

One morning she had heard him his lessons and kept him safely out of the way of his mother till half-past twelve, when Parker was to take him down to the village to buy a book. He got ready, and in high glee ran into the snuggery to May for the money. May told Durill how good he was, and Durill kissed the glowing face, and gave him another shilling, making in all three. He thanked his good uncle and aunt and ran off to Parker, who was waiting in the hall with Ponto.

May and Durill went on with their usual morning's work, but had not done four lines before they heard Ivo's voice calling "Uncle Durill! Uncle Durill!" followed by shrill screams, some in a child's voice and some in a woman's. Durill reached the door in one bound, knocking down all obstacles in his way, with May close at his heels.

The screams came from the bottom of the hall, where stood a group, the centre of which was Ivo,

writhing in the hands of his father, who, with a riding whip, was beating him most unmercifully. At one side stood his mother with her face red with passion, and her lips distended like a black woman's, while poor Parker, on her knees, was begging the brute to stop beating the now exhausted child. With an awful oath, Durill sprang forward and stopped the pending blow. The whip was now in his hands, and the contest between two men, instead of a man and a child. Quick as lightning big Durill seized the inhuman father by the collar, and twisted him on to his knees on the floor. All his efforts to rise were useless, and down came the blows like hailstones on his shoulders. Durill did not spare him, and none of the horrified lookers-on ventured to stay his hand. They knew better than interfere. The great man was like a madman with passion, he whipped the howling wretch without any regret, and when the strong arm was exhausted he opened the heavy door,

and flung him out on to the steps. Then he turned with expanded nostrils and flashing eyes to Mrs. Gilbert.

"Madam, when you have completed your arrangements a carriage shall take you to the station."

"Oh! Durill—Durill! what have you done?" wailed Madam Drever.

"Punished a brute, Madam, and put him out. No such inhumanity shall be practised under my roof. Look there."

Aye, indeed, look there—at little Ivo, lying white and senseless in Parker's arms.

The child was quite still, the pale brow cut, and the blood trickling over the white face and into the chestnut locks. Well might Durill's face blanch and his eyes flash at such a sight; it would have touched the hardest heart to have seen that gentle little lad more dead than alive. The sight of the poor baby lying so white and still seemed to kindle Durill's anger afresh.

"My God! look there; is not that enough? You may beat a horse, but not so unmercifully as that brute has beaten this child."

No one made answer, and old Blake came up with some brandy. Parker was crying bitterly, and across her face was a red, swollen line; it was the mark of Gibert's whip; he had struck her when she interfered to save poor Ivo.

The group of servants made no effort to restrain their horror and indignation, and the words—"shame," "brute," "monster," were bandied from mouth to mouth. Mrs. Morrison strove to maintain order, and told them to go back to their duties; but no, they had their feelings, and they had been roused, and, for the time, they forgot the relation that existed between them and the family they served. They tried to get some brandy into Ivo to revive the child, but his little white teeth were clenched tightly. May raised her white face to Durill in mute horror.

"Here, let me take him," said he, and, stooping down, he tenderly lifted the child in his strong arms and bore him into the library, mumuring, "Poor little lad."

May turned to Blake—

"Send for Mr. Calvert at once, Blake?"

"Yes, Miss May, I will."

Madam was like one bereft of her senses; she followed them into the library, and stood with the rest round the sofa where lay the lovely child faintly breathing.

She wrung her hands in agony, and moaned—

"What could have ailed Gilbert to do this thing?"

Durill gently, but firmly led her from the room.

"Mother, listen," said he, when they were outside the door. "That man cannot sleep here another night, or darken these doors again. Take your leave of him and his wife; this is their last visit here. Go and hasten their preparations, or I will."

Judy was standing near with clapsed hands, but she now came forward with her stony face.

"Gilbert is upstairs with his wife; they are alone, not one of the servants will go near them, and I won't."

"Who let Gilbert in, Judy?"

"His wife, Durill; they are packing up to go."

"So much the better; they shall have a carriage to take them to the station. Mother, be so kind as to tell them there is a train at half-past three; they must go by that."

Madam walked off like one in a dream, and Judy exclaimed—

"What will happen next; what on earth made Gilbert do it, Durill?"

"Heaven only knows, Judy; he has all but killed the little lad; if he dies, I presume you know what will be the next step?"

Judy's face blanched whiter than ever.

"Oh, Durill, for God's sake don't!"

"Nay, Judy, it is not in my power to prevent the consequences; there are too many witnesses."

May appeared at the door, and beckoned to Durill.

"What is it, dear?"

"He is coming to now; I am sure he would like to see you, Durill—he called to you to save him."

Durill went in, followed by Judy.

Yes, Ivo was coming to, and Parker and Mrs. Morrison were shedding tears of joy. Judy started when she caught sight of the stripe down the faithful girl's face; it was quite swollen and turning blue. If that was the state of Parker's face, with only one cut, what must be the state of Ivo's body? Judy shuddered.

The beautiful eyes opened, and the first thing they rested upon was Durill's kind face bent down, smiling to that of the child. For a second there was a dead look in them, till gradually he regained possession of his faculties.

Then he recollected, and, opening one chubby hand that had been fast locked, displayed the three bright shillings with which he was going so merrily to buy his book. He looked at them a second, then dropped them into Durill's hand, and, smiling faintly, turned his little face away, while two big tears rolled over the white cheeks. There was something awful in the mute agony of the brave child; it went straight to the hearts of those round. May felt a dreadful coldness creep over her, and her pulses stood still; she could neither speak nor move, and she knew that Durill was carrying her out of the room, but she could not prevent him. In the hall he stopped and gazed into her white face.

"Why, May, my dear girl, you love the boy too much; do you know you are like marble, and as cold and stiff?"

"Yes, I know, Durill; you should have let me be, I should have got all right. I have never fainted in my life, and I never hope to. It is

only here," putting her hand to her left side, "a pain and a fearful numbness, but it always goes away. But oh! Durill! Ivo! this beating has broken his dear little heart nearly. I could not stand the way he gave you back the money, it was like parting with his child life. I had far sooner Gilbert had whipped me than Ivo, he will never forget it."

Durill was very grave; he had been rather frightened by May's face, it was so awfully death-like. And now the child's trouble seemed causing her great grief. May never cried, but when her heart was wrung as now, an indescribable look of stony sorrow came into the quiet face that was far worse than any amount of tears.

"I hope Mark won't be long. I will go back to Ivo now."

And she left Durill.

Little Ivo was lying perfectly still, with his face turned from the light. He was not crying, Parker seemed to be doing that for him. He

was quiet, with his eyes wide open. Mrs. Morrison kept giving him a taste of weak brandy and water every now and then. He could not bear to be moved, his back was so sore. May knelt down to him and he stroked her face fondly. They neither of them spoke. I don't know which of the two suffered most, May or the child.

Presently Mark came, and gently as any woman examined the little lad. The tears started to his eyes when, after Ivo had been carried to the nursery, May began to undress him. The poor little fellow was one mass of stripes, for his thin little garments had been no protection against his brutal father's fury. And oh! he was so patient while Mark, with quivering lips, applied a soothing, cooling lotion, and put him into his bed. Sleep was the best thing for him, and a sleeping draught Mark administered. It was five minutes past three, and the brougham at the door. Mark, May, and Durill were sitting in the library, talking about Ivo and the scene, of course.

"What made Gilbert beat the child? I never heard of such an inhuman thing in all my life. It is much if it does not cost him his life; the child is certain to be very ill after it. The beating is by no means the worst feature in the case, it is the consequences of that beating that are to be dreaded."

"Indeed, Mark, I don't know, I have not heard the rights of the story myself. I only know he left May and me in high spirits to go with Parker to buy a book in the village, and he had not been gone three minutes before we heard him shouting 'Uncle Durill' and screaming. Has Parker told you, May? I see her face is striped."

"Yes, Durill, she has; in fact, I asked her. She says that she was waiting for Ivo in the hall, when Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert came along. Gilbert said he was going for a ride. At that instant Ivo came rushing up.

"'See, Parker, what I have got.' 'What

have you got, kid?' asked his mother. Parker says something in her voice and manner seemed to check Ivo, and he involuntarily shut his hand up, instead of showing even Parker. The child never did get on with his mother, since she came. Without waiting a second for the boy to recover himself, she turned to her husband exclaiming—

"'There you see for yourself how he disobeys me, and it is their teaching.'

"Gilbert at once sprang at him, and commenced beating him with the whip. Parker tried to interfere, but he struck her twice; once across the shoulders, and once across her face, which mark you see; the rest you know."

"Yes, and I know this, that it would not take much to make me go and give that monster of a man another thrashing; a nice son, forsooth, to be a mother's idol."

"Oh! your mother has, indeed, been unfortunate in her choice of favourites; I hardly know which is the worst, Gilbert or Crispin."

"Nor I, Mark; but I am rather inclined to fancy that Gilbert was partly under the influence of brandy when he whipped Ivo."

"I should not wonder if you were correct, May; and since we are talking about brandy, I will tell you a little thing. I did not like to name it before, because I am only brother-in-law, and such people are best at peace with their wife's family. But during the time Crispin was helping me, he one day made up such a mixture for a baby—Harry, the railway porter's child—that had it got it, it would have died."

"Oh! Mark."

"It's a fact, May; he had made it the strength for a grown up person. I always tasted every bottle before it went out, and it was a mercy I did. He had been in the bar at the "Stork" that morning, and though he was not actually screwed he was so muddled that he could not measure the quantities properly. I would not have him any longer—that was why he stopped coming to assist me."

"Then he will never get on at Port Jackson or anywhere else. We did hope he might get a post as assistant to some doctor, but if he drinks in the day time in the midst of his work he will never get on. I don't know what will be done, I am sure; but Hind, Julius's friend, will let us hear how he goes on from time to time. But I should not be surprised to see him back any day."

Before anyone could answer Durill's speech the door opened, and in came Madam, looking scared and flurried.

"Durill, the carriage is round, and Gilbert and his wife are ready, but none of the servants will carry their luggage down. Do come and enforce obedience."

Durill rose, followed by Mark and May. The scene in the hall was a curious one indeed. There stood Gilbert—very white and angry, while Emily held her head in the air, and looked very red and sulky. Mrs. Morrison and Blake stood at the

far end, Judy and Lois in the doorway of the morning-room. Durill called—

"Summon the servants, Blake."

"Durill," said Madam, "you will make them do it?"

"It is not in my power, Madam; they are not slaves. They can choose whom they will serve."

In obedience to Durill's command the servants trooped in—some with their sleeves rolled up to the top, some with towels over their heads to keep out the dust—just as they had left their various occupations, and many were not there. But the gathering amounted to thirteen or fifteen. Now Gilbert had never been a favourite, and since the arrival of his refined wife he had diminished considerably in the servants' estimation, consequently open rebellion was written on each face at the bottom of the hall.

Durill spoke to them at once.

"I hear you refuse to bring down the luggage. Now I am not going to command you or threaten

you with the loss of your places—many of you have been here years—but I tell you it is my wish that you carry down those trunks, and pay the usual respect to those leaving this house."

A murmur ran through the crowd, but no one moved a step; there was a dead silence, and then old Blake stepped forward, and, bowing respectfully, said—

"Mr. Durill, sir, we will all gladly serve you and your family to the last, but after this morning's scene we cannot serve Mr. Gilbert again."

Durill said nothing for a second, and Madam clung to his arm in terror. Then came the deep tones, firm and distinct—

"I do not blame you, I think all the better of you for it; I would not do it myself. Call two of the stable boys, and if they object" (turning to Gilbert), "you must bring it down yourself. You see what your brutal conduct has produced. You are shunned by your fellow-creatures."

Gilbert darted a furious glance at Durill.

"But I will claim my child; I will take him away."

Durill's lips curled.

"Your child! I wonder you own to it. No, you will not take your child; there is no telling which will win the battle just begun—Life or Death. If he lives, you cannot claim him, because I will expose this morning's work to the eyes of the world, and there are too many witnesses against you. No law will give a child to its father to be beaten to death like a dog."

There was no reply made, and the two stable boys carried down the boxes, and the servants withdrew. Durill, Madam, Judy, Lois, Mark, and May stood in the hall and watched the departure of Gilbert and his wife. There was no shaking hands, simply bows, and Madam cried bitterly.

Durill held the door in his own hand, and shut it after Gilbert and his wife for ever.

CHAPTER XII.

The story of Gilbert Drever's ejection went the round of the place, it was known far and wide. Meanwhile Ivo lay swinging between life and death. His ravings were pitiful to hear; he went over again the scene in the snuggery, the three shillings to buy his book, and then came the beating. He tossed and writhed on the bed, and implored Uncle Durill to save him twenty times in the day. He then imagined himself playing as of old with dear little Evelyn, and smiles would wreath themselves over the little wan face, and the thin little fingers would stroke and pat the pillows in mistake for Evelyn. They said he could not live, and through the long, long weary nights May watched, and turned the pillows to

the cool side, and put ice on the burning little head. She never ceased praying for his life if God saw fit to spare it; she wanted to keep him yet a little while, if only to render him happy, and dispel the horrid beating from his mind. When the fever left him there was the extreme weakness to struggle with. He was just a baby over again, and many and many a fine, sunny morning Durill was to be seen walking up and down in the sunshine with a bundle in his arms. That bundle was sweet, patient little Ivo; he liked being carried, and he had whatever he liked best. No one ever heard a single complaint or murmur out of his lips, and May used to look in wonder, and think could God only be lending the angel child to them for a little longer? But no, he gradually gained strength. But he was changed, oh! so much. No one could believe it possible such an impression could be made on the mind of a child of such tender years. But Ivo was old for his age, and the beating his father

gave him was engraven on his heart; yes, every stripe. With those three bright shillings Ivo's childish life had passed away. His pretty face had a look of sorrow, heartrending to see; he clung to Durill and May more than ever, and they could scarcely bear the little fellow out of their sight. So when he liked Parker carried him down and put him on a couch in the snuggery, so that he might see Durill and May, and get petted and fondled. And someone else liked these fine spring mornings too, and that was Ponto. He seemed to think it incumbent upon him to keep special watch over the lovely, amiable child who stroked him so gently and whispered to him, and he would sit for hours on the couch watching the white face, and now and then stoop down and give it a comforting, affectionate lick. One morning May and Durill sat watching a very pretty scene. It was a lovely morning in April, the 9th, and the county ball was to be held that night at the "Stork." It was such a fresh,

delicious spring morning; Durill had been down to the station and seen old Mr. Cavendish off to Town by the five minutes to nine train; he had intended going himself, and had sent a groom on horseback with his coat to the station, but once there he seemed to change his mind, and after buying a paper strode off down Randals Lane, so those at the station thought, who had been admiring the handsome man in his velvet coat. He seemed out of temper, and banged the glass door. Ah, me; there are worse things than temper!

And back he went to Wild Wood, and found little Ivo on the sofa asleep, and he followed May's example, and sat watching.

What a pretty picture it was.

The child had fallen into a doze, with his face to the window, and the sun streamed in and caught the beautiful face and shining curls as they straggled over the pillow. It turned everything to gold, and danced round the slumbering

boy. On the top of him lay Ponto, with his paws crossed and his eyes blinking. His coat of fluffy white was gilded too; one thin hand lay close to Ponto, as if put there for him to lick, which he did every now and then. And Ivo slept on, with a smile on his face; the old smile came back in his sleep, for while he slept he forgot his sorrow. And May watching wondered whether the children in Heaven slept so. Presently she looked at Durill.

"Durill, I have been thinking something to-day."

"What, love? Something nice for the child, of course?"

"Yes, it is; I think it would be nice if we gave him Ponto; they care so much for each other."

"So do I, May; and I can easily get you another when you want one. Yes, give it to the little lad, by all means, if it will make him happy."

The County Ball was well attended that 9th of April; and long after two in the morning carriages rolled through the quiet village. Durill went, but took scarcely any part in the amusement; he did not dance—he was not a dancing man; but he leant by the window, and looked into the village street and along the Dorking road.

Captain Hardwick kept coming, as of old, to see Durill, but never betrayed that there existed any understanding between him and May. The changes recorded at Wild Wood had not been without their effect. There was rather a stillness about the place—and no wonder. Gilbert had not written, and the silence was ominous; there had been no decided steps taken with regard to throwing the property into Chancery. Durill and Julius did not wish to do it, and unless someone insisted on a division, they would go on as they were. Julius was of opinion that Gilbert was only waiting till they

commenced a division, to step in and demand his portion. One day Captain Hardwick came up to see Durill, and found Ivo with them in the snuggery. They chattered and played with the little fellow till Parker came for him. Captain Hardwick regarded the girl attentively, and, when she had departed with her charge, he said—

"I don't know whether either of you notice it, but I observe a great change in Parker; she has never been the same since the night Ivo had nightmare, and came screaming down-stairs."

"Indeed!" said May, looking up; "well, she is not quite so lively, but I did not perceive anything remarkable; I must notice her."

"Do so, Miss May, and you will find I am correct. That girl lives in dread, or I am much mistaken. I did not quite understand her that night; it is my opinion she knew more about the child's fright than she owned to."

"There, Hardwick, I partly agree with you,"

said Durill; "I never could make out what ailed Parker—her terror was extreme. But a better girl never lived, or a more faithful one, eh, May?"

"No, indeed; I trust Parker implicitly. She is devoted to Ivo, and, indeed, to us all; she is always the same, and always at her post. She has never relaxed one bit in her care of Ivo, though he is so much stronger; and I am sure she would lay down her life for the child."

Captain Hardwick smiled at May's earnestness.

"You give her an excellent character, and I don't, for a moment, doubt it, but it does not shake my belief that Parker has something on her mind—something that renders her uneasy."

May felt very much perplexed; but not being able to contradict the Captain, she maintained silence, and the conversation took an opposite direction. About this time Captain Hardwick was summoned to town, and there he stayed, much to Durill's annoyance, who wanted him to

chat with occasionally. He wrote to Durill from time to time, and one morning, on the receipt of an effusion, Durill ejaculated—

"By Jove!" but declined to tell May, who was present, the news. "Hardwick says I am not to, May."

And May did not inquire again. When the papers arrived, Durill seized hold of the "Graphic," and opening it, handed it to May, and asked—

"What do you think of the new Lord Hardwick; he is a good looking fellow, is he not?"

The new Peer was Captain Godwin Meredith Hardwick; the old uncle had died at last. The old gentleman that poor George used to call "long-winded."

May's face flushed slightly; she was moved, supposing the change in his position obliged him to make a change in his affection; but she made no sign, and returned the paper smilingly to Durill.

"I am very pleased he has at last got the estates; I believe he will make good use of the money. I am only sorry poor George is not here to share the good fortune."

Durill looked rather amazed at May's coolness, but he echoed her speech about George. "Yes, indeed, poor fellow, the fortune's come too late to benefit him. Godwin will marry now, I should think, and give up his snug little box down here."

"Most likely; there are plenty ready to take Felton Cottage."

"And how about its master, May?"

"Ready to take him too, I have no doubt, Durill."

No more was said, and the news spread rapidly through the house. Madam was extremely pleased, no doubt, on Lois's account; but her ladyship reckoned without her host.

A day or two passed by, and one afternoon May was sitting doing nothing (for a wonder) in

the library; she was tired. All at once the door opened, and Durill's head appeared, his eyes dancing again as he said—"Here is Lord Hardwick to make his peace with you, May," and shut the door.

"May, dearest, what is to do?"

"Nothing, Lord Hardwick; only things are changed since I saw you last."

"Oh! May, do you think I am changed. No, my heart is the same, darling; only my position is altered."

He gathered her in his arms, and saw the tears in the soft brown eyes. She did not seek to hide her great joy; she looked up at him, and said—

"Oh! Godwin, I did not know how things might be; we were not formally engaged, and I did not want to stand in your light."

"And supposing I had wished to be free, what would you have done with your love, May?"

"Given it to you."

"What, if I had none to give you in return,

and married someone else, would you have still loved me?"

"Yes, because I could not have helped myself; I could not have got it back. I have given you my heart, but I do not ask you to take me. I gave you my love before you asked me for it."

He looked fondly at the pale girl.

"May, my dear, I am a rich man—rich in money and rich in love. Your love is worth all the world to me, darling; yours is the true, lasting love. You loved me for myself before you knew anything about me, and God only knows how I strove to be worthy of that love before I asked you for it; and I shall go on striving every day of my life. I am glad of this fortune, because I can give you every comfort, and a position worthy of you."

"Godwin, you have told Durill?"

"Yes, May, I told him long ago; and he told me something was in your mind about a change; he reads your face like a book."

"Good old Durill! I am half afraid he spoils me."

Lord Hardwick did not seem to think anything of the kind.

"What sort of a place is Hardwick Castle, Godwin?"

"A glorious old place, my dear; not unlike this, only white stone instead of red. But they are sending some views for you to see, and then you can tell me what you think of our home. You are fit to be 'my lady.'"

"It is a good thing you are of that opinion, else I should have you up for a breach of promise."

May's engagement was now publicly announced. Madam, in her heart, wondered what on earth Lord Hardwick could see in plain May; if it had been dear Lois, now. But Lord Hardwick was a wise, far-seeing man; he chose for ever, not for a day; and May was really not plain, because she was extremely intelligent, and no one is plain

who has an intelligent face. It is almost a pity men care so much for beauty; they frequently lay up a store of trouble and misery for themselves. Not that I am jealous of pretty faces, or run them down; far from it. No one admires beauty more than I do; I would not have an ugly person for my companion for anything, but I like the mind to be perfect as well as the face, and that you seldom find. For, alas! when a girl has a pretty face she is considered to have all things needful, and the culture of pure, holy, gentle feelings is too often omitted. Then tell me to what must we turn when that beauty fades? To whom should a husband turn for assistance and comfort if not to his wife? and supposing she cannot give it? then God help them both. How many a poor delicate woman leads and guides a strong, self-willed man, leads him by a silken thread, which he makes no effort to break. She has twined herself round his heart, knitted her soul to his. Wives, don't attempt to make

your husbands give up their ways for yours, even if you know they are wrong. If he is not religious, don't always tell him of it, or wear a long face and sing hymns. Be cheerful, and do right yourself gently, but firmly—example is before precept. Some portion of life is dark and dreary to everyone, and it is a wife's special vocation to act as a star to her husband; to keep her lamps always burning with a clear, steady light; to guide his footsteps through the dark and narrow ways, till they reach the cross of Jesus!

So Lord Hardwick was a wise man; he might have got plenty of handsome women, but he could not have got a better "light." May bore her new position with her usual quietness—grace would be the more suitable word, I know, but I am not sure that there was much grace about May Drever—and received the congratulations that poured in with unaffected frankness. She valued the good wishes of everyone, and she

had them. Durill was in a great state of delight, and told everyone he saw it long ago, at which May and Lord Hardwick laughed. The news was received with a burst of applause at Gibbons Grove; even poor Mrs. Calvert, with all her crotchets, liked May, and not unfrequently held her up as a pattern to Kate and Ruby. Judy seemed to have struck up quite a friendship with Kate; she liked to run down of an afternoon, and sit and chat, getting Kate to play pretty much.

Oh! poor stricken hearts, blighted in the fullness of their youth; each with the ashes of her idol raked into a hallowed little heap; well might they seek each other, for sorrow was the chain that linked them together!

So things stood, a little social pleasure on foot, little bits of fun and amusement, little dashes of light amid the mist of troubles, and a great deal of Lord Hardwick at Wild Wood. Such was the state of things when May ushered itself in with

much sunshine, and the twittering of young birds as they hopped amid the apple blossom in every pretty garden. And with it the great and world-wide race, the one subject of common interest, from royalty to street Arabs. Every small child, in rags and tatters, knows about it, and everyone who has a penny has a halfpenny at stake. Oh! the heartbeatings, the suspense; everyone takes a holiday, but none can rest, for it is—Derby Day.

The morning rises hot and heavy with mist, and gradually Epsom Downs becomes alive. Those who arrived over night, wake up and plunge into the business of the day. By ten o'clock the fours in hand go by blowing horns as they pass through the villages; and the gentlemen, with veils flying from their hats, kiss their hands to every girl they meet. As the time goes on people rush into their greatest enemies' arms, exclaiming—"What's won?" "Blue Gown" is the answer; and later in the hot afternoon

the carriages return, dragged by weary horses, and filled with sorrowful or joyful men, as the case may be. It was no use going to get anything done—repairs, &c., that required a man, for in every case it was " Mr. So-and-Sc, or my husband is from home to day."

Even " Sweet Fellow" went, and in the fullness of his baby heart and exuberance of his spirits, leant from his drag as it rolled along the road, and accosted everyone in his shrill treble with—" Going to the Derby?"

CHAPTER XIII.

About this time came a letter from Crispin; he had arrived safely, and had time to look about him. But he did not appear struck with the beauties of Port Jackson; indeed his letter was full of nothing but bitter complaints. This letter was to his mother, and even she was rather startled at the turn affairs had taken. Now that he was safe out of the reach of justice, he took good care to let them know that he considered himself hardly treated, in fact, a most cruelly wronged young man, and spared neither Julius nor Durill.

When Madam gave this promising effusion into Durill's hands, he indulged in a few strong adjectives at Crispin's cost, and Judy, who

chanced to be present, thought it a lucky thing for Crispin that he was safe at Port Jackson. But Crispin Benton Drever was the prince of cowards; if he had been within reach he would have knelt at the feet of anyone, but once away, and he showed in his true colours, and put out his claws. However, there was one object gained in this letter, it led to a full disclosure to the entire family of Crispin's doings; Julius and Durill waxed wrath, and told everything, which you may be sure did not tend to strengthen Crispin's case.

By the same mail came a letter for Julius, from his friend Will Hind. He spoke of Crispin in anything but a favourable tone, and seemed to think he had come to play, and nothing else.

"The fact is, Julius, your young brother has no work in him; he is already a great favourite with several leading families, and the best, I think, he can do is to marry some heiress; there are plenty of them at large. If he does not do

that, I am afraid you will have him back pretty soon, for the way he shapes (sluggish as the people are here) he will never make salt to his porridge."

Julius enclosed this cheering epistle to Durill in a long letter, that was principally on family matters. He had been trying to discover Gilbert's whereabouts, and failed utterly. He had gone, and his wife with him, most probably to some of her relations, and as their places of abode were unknown to the Drevers, they could not find them. As long as he kept quiet, all well and good, but Julius did not like the silence; it seemed too calm to last; it was like the stillness before a storm.

After Lord Hardwick had stated his opinion with regard to Parker, May had observed her more closely, and could not longer conceal from herself that there was something odd about the girl. One thing in particular struck May, and that was her timidity. If any one entered the

nursery suddenly, Parker turned as white as chalk, and nothing could induce her to either sit or stand with her back to the door or window.

One evening May went into the nursery between dinner and tea; Ivo's boots wanted repairing, and May was sending them to Johnson's, by one of the maids. When she entered the room she found Parker sitting at the table with a lamp burning, though it was not quite dark. She was not working or reading; she was crying softly to herself.

"Why, Parker, what is to do?" said May, kindly putting her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Are you ill?"

The girl at once ceased, and wiped her eyes; she seemed to hesitate a second, and listen to little Ivo's quiet breathing. It came gently from the other room, the door of which was ajar. Parker seemed satisfied, and, raising her red eyes to May's wondering face, she said—

"Miss May, if you have a little time to spare,

will you give it to me? I have something to tell you."

"Yes, willingly, Parker," replied May, seating herself at the table likewise. "I am ready to hear anything, and help you if I can."

The girl smiled, and shook her head sadly.

"Oh! Miss May, I have done wrong, but I did it to spare you and your family, and then I was so terrified, it was not quite clear to myself. But now I see that I should have spoken; and many and many a time have I tried to, but my tongue seemed to stick fast. All has gone wrong since then. Miss May, do you recollect the night of Master Ivo's fright?"

"Yes, perfectly well, Parker; what of it?"

"Miss May, I could have spoken then, but I believed I was doing right to keep quiet. Miss May, the child was quite true in what he said; he did see a man. This was the way of it. I had put him to bed, little dear, as good as gold, and sat down to my work here, leaving the door

open a bit, like to night. A quarter-of-an-hour could not have gone, Miss May, before I heard a footsteps in the night nursery, and thought perhaps it was you or Mr. Durill, I should have said the Squire, come to see Master Ivo, but all at once the child gave an awful scream, and I heard him running over the floor and down the passage, shrieking your name. I was startled, you may be sure, Miss May, and I jumped up hurriedly and made for this door, intending to follow the child. But I had hardly got to the side of the room before I saw that door (pointing to the one between the two rooms, and which was just gaping) open, and a man came out. He made straight for the window, never looking either to the right or the left; he had a black sort of thing on his face, but as he ran round this table to the window it dropped off, and while stooping to pick it up, his face was slightly turned to me. May God forgive me, Miss May, but it was Mr. Crispin. I watched him open the

window and let himself down by the oak tree. Miss May, I was dazed, I did not know what to do, but I rushed across the room and shut the window to. I was terrified nearly out of my wits, and I could not conceal my terror."

Parker paused for breath, and May exclaimed—

"You have been mistaken, Parker, because Mr. Crispin—"

"Stop, Miss May, please, I know what you are going to say—that Mr. Crispin was in the drawing-room. I know he was, and that's what stopped me from speaking, I think. I was so horrified when I saw him with the rest of you gathered round Master Ivo in the hall, that I felt ready to drop, and I thought it must have been his ghost. Then the night I saw it again in the court-yard and spoke to it, if you remember, Miss May, and we afterwards met Mr. Crispin on the stairs, that put the finish to it, and I knew then that it was his ghost I had seen."

"But, Parker, ghosts don't go through windows."

"I know they don't, Miss May, and yet I'll swear *I saw Mr. Crispin* both in this room and in the court-yard, the night you sent me to find Mr. Durill. Oh! Miss May, it is with me always, I dare not sit in the dark—I think I should go mad; I am always expecting to see it again. I wanted to tell you, and I did not like, for there came so much trouble to you all after that night."

Here Parker fell to sobbing again, and May watched her for a bit. At last she rose, and said to the poor girl—

"I almost wish you had told this to me before, Parker, but perhaps it is all for the best. But I beg you not, under any consideration, to name it to anyone. I trust you, Parker?"

"Aye, dear Miss May, you may trust me, I would go through fire to serve you. They've all along been at me in the servants' hall to know what ailed me, but I never told a word. Miss May, you ar'n't angry with me, are you?"

"No, indeed, Parker, I think you acted for the best, and those sort of things are always better kept quiet."

The lamp was not very bright, and Parker did not see her dear Miss May's face while she spoke to her so calmly. There was an awful shade over it, and when she got into the corridor she stopped short, and wrung her white hands together in agony till the serpent's head dug into the soft flesh. Then she sped on quickly to the snuggery, her long black skirts clinging to her as she glided along, and reaching it passed in. She saw Durill's handsome face on the far side of the lamp; he was smoking, but for that May did not mind. She sank down with her head on the table, striving for breath with which to tell the horrible truth that Parker's story had revealed to her.

"May! May!" exclaimed Durill's voice, "what is it, my pet?"

Two strong arms lifted her up, and her poor

throbbing head was pillowed on someone's shoulder, while a deep voice, that was not Durill's, spoke soothing words.

"My darling! my darling May! what is to do?"

May knew who it was; she had not noticed Lord Hardwick when she entered the room. She drew herself away from him, but not unkindly, and turned to Durill her pale face. Looking at him she repeated word for word Parker's strange story, and when she had finished Durill's face expressed blank astonishment.

"Well, May, I don't yet quite understand what you are driving at; it was not Crispin, what then?"

"Oh, Durill! don't you see? it was Gilbert; he and Crispin are much alike, and Parker, never having seen Gilbert, mistook him for Crispin."

"But, May, supposing it was Gilbert, what would he want at Ivo's bed side? or, indeed, in the house at all?"

Again the agonized look came into May's face, she clasped her hands together, and sinking her voice, whispered, "The will."

The pipe dropped from Durill's hand, and he stood straight up, his face as white as its bronziness would allow it to go, staring fixedly at May.

"Gracious heavens!" ejaculated Lord Hardwick. "May, my darling, you are nervous; this is an idea of your own; such a thing could not be."

"No, Godwin, I am not nervous, I feel that it is so—Gilbert has the missing will."

"But, May," gasped big Durill; "how would he get it? It was locked up."

"Yes; but have you forgotten how poor papa used to leave his keys about? Many and many a time they have lain half the day on the study table. Durill, just think; take your memory back to the day of the funeral; do you remember Gilbert's composed face? I do. He would not have been that calm if his interests

had been at stake. He expressed no astonishment at the loss of the will, and made no attempt to find it. His conduct struck me as queer throughout the entire business, and I recollect wondering at his tranquillity. I know I am right—he has it; how he came by it remains to be told. But there was no difficulty about entering this house, because that side door is always on the latch, and is now, I have no doubt, if you take the trouble to try. If you want that will, Durill, you have only to go to Gilbert for it."

There was a dreadful earnestness about May, that readily convinced her two listeners of the truth of her statement. Strange to say, May had not been alone in her wonderment at Gilbert's behaviour. Old Mr. Payne had remarked to Durill and Julius, while busily engaged hunting for the missing deed—" Your brother, Mr. Gilbert, seems to take it very coolly." Durill

considered for a moment, and then spoke in a low tone—

"God knows we have had plenty of trouble lately, but this seems the worst of all. I did hope that when Crispin was safely away there would be an end of it. How in all the world is this to be set about? What do you recommend, Godwin?"

"I recommend Gilbert being spoken to, though it is a mighty ticklish business. The idea itself is quite enough to turn one's courage; it's perfectly awful, Durill, to steal his father's will! 'Pon my soul, I would as soon ask a man if he did not cut his mother's throat."

"I don't know how we are to do it, I am sure, and the worst of it is we can't find Gilbert; he is missing just at present. Julius wrote, telling me only the other day. Since I horse-whipped him, and turned him out, nothing has been seen or heard of him; and no one knows where they

have gone. So that the first business is, find him, and the next speak to him."

"Yes, that is it; and if I were you, Durill, I would write and ask that 'cute brother of yours, Julius, to come down, and tell him all about it, or write. For, in my opinion, the sooner it is seen to, the better."

"Supposing Gilbert goes abroad? If you don't find the will, and have a peaceable division, he can come down on you for his share ten years hence, so you will never be safe a single day. I strongly advise you to find that will, or attempt no division unless you are prepared to pay Gilbert his share."

"And that I am not, Godwin; I will never be a party to fraud, and it would be nothing else but a fraud to the rest of the family. My father told me, and also May, only a day before he died, that Gilbert had secured more than his share. It seems as if the poor old man knew we should have this bother. There is also another thing

that strengthens May's argument, and that is, every single paper relative to Gilbert and the money the Squire had paid for him, was gone, and they were with the will in the same drawer."

"It certainly does look black, I must confess. I should be inclined to find Gilbert, and watch his movements. Why not engage a detective?"

"So I would if his name were Smith; but I don't like doing it to my own brother. But I shall put it into Julius's hands to decide, and abide by his decision. What do you say, May?"

"I say Gilbert has that will. What made him shave off his moustache, that he was so proud of? So that he might hang round the place and be taken for Crispin, as poor Parker did that night. I'll tell you what it is, Durill, I am only astonished none of us thought of it before."

There was a firm, quiet, certainty about May's manner that surprised the two men. They talked on for some time, and then sought the drawing-

room, where Madam lay back in her chair dozing. She had taken Crispin's misdemeanour very much to heart; May wondered what she would say or do if Gilbert's faults were brought home to him. All May wanted to do was to find the will, for she plainly saw there would be neither rest nor peace till that was accomplished. Lord Hardwick watched her grave face anxiously; he wished he could take her away then and there out of it all. She was too young for so much trouble. But then her very troubles and trials tended to make her what she was—a strong, gentle, loving woman. She was passing through the fire—God's fire—and he was content to leave her.

CHAPTER XIV.

The evening wore itself away, and about half-past ten Lord Hardwick said he must go. Durill and May attended him to the door, and then Durill left them to take their parting kiss. Of course there was something to say—one or two of those sweet nothings that constitute wooing. The night was lovely; there was the beautiful May moon shedding her silvery light and tinting every tree and blade of grass. It was almost as light as day, and after a lingering kiss May stood to watch Godwin's great shoulders disappear amongst the trees. He took the carriage way down; it was the longest, but what of that? The night was splendid, and he had a good cigar—one of Durill's huge things—to soothe his feelings.

So he walked briskly along, thinking deeply of the startling revelation made by May, and his thoughts drifted to her and her qualities.

"God bless my darling," murmured he; "it's— Merciful God, what's that?"

He came to a dead stop, the cigar dropped from between his teeth, great drops of sweat stood on the soldier's brow, and his broad chest heaved; his eyes were strained, they were rivetted to one spot—a fine copper beech tree, whose ample foliage afforded shade on many a sunny day; its trunk was thick, but unusually so to-night, by means of a figure standing by it. Well might Lord Hardwick stand; he, the tried soldier who had faced many a danger, recoiled from the figure standing in the moonlight.

Was it a phantom—a spirit—a what? Some sort of a longing for whatever it was came to him, if but for a moment, if only to say good-bye, and he held out his arms to it. But it did not vanish into air, his arms did not clasp simply

space, there was something within them that breathed, in which the life-blood was flowing, and the two words were spoken—

"Godwin!" "George!"

Yes, it was George Hardwick. The sea had indeed given up its dead. Shall you laugh if I tell you that then in the moonlight those two brothers knelt on the green sward with bowed heads, and thanked God for reuniting them, stood with clasped hands, silently gazing into each other's faces? and their hearts were full; aye, full of gladness that was too deep for utterance. It was a strange scene, but there were no lookers-on but the angels, and they understood it. George was the first to break silence. His voice was just the same, that peculiar mild-spoilt tone that was so wonderfully seductive.

"What changes there have been there"—pointing to Wild Wood, whose end was just visible up the slope through a gap in the trees—"since I left."

"Yes, George, there have been changes everywhere. But come, let us get home; I want to get you within four walls; I feel half afraid that you are not real."

George laughed and linked his arm into Godwin's, and together they completed the walk that Lord Hardwick had commenced alone. Felton Cottage was reached in due time. There was a lamp burning in the little cosy room which, when George had been at home, never looked tidy; but to-night it presented a very different aspect. Never was light so welcome to Godwin Hardwick before. He took George and turned his face to the lamp's rays, and studied it affectionately. There was a change, but not for the worse—nothing serious, only a change that rest and home comforts would drive away.

"Now, my dear lad, sit down and tell me all the story; how you, whom we all mourned for as dead, return in life quietly one May night?"

George threw himself on to the very sofa,

stretched full length on which we first made his acquaintance, if you recollect.

"Well, Godwin, it is soon accounted for. When the 'Sea Gull' foundered, which she did one night about half-past eleven, I and Grenville got into a boat with a lot more; but in the hurry and confusion they had forgotton oars and food. My God it was awful, there we were, powerless, at the mercy of the waves. In the darkness we got separated from the other boats, and drifted away alone. Never to my dying day shall I forget that morning; the feeling that came over me with the first streaks of light. Words cannot express the chilling deathliness that seemed to creep over me. There was the boundless ocean as far as the eye could see, the sky above us with its fleecy clouds of blue and white, and we ten people in an open boat, without an oar, a rudder, or a sail, a morsel of food, or a drop of water, drifting with the wind. There we must sit and slowly wait for death, endure the pangs of thirst

and hunger and never move. Of all horrible deaths, Godwin, that is the most horrible, because you have time to think, and you can do nothing else. The agony of the mind is worse than all. Never shall I forget the first quarter of an hour after the discovery was made that we had no food; it took them all that time to realize it, Godwin, because in the darkness and haste no one had thought of it. Poor Grenville was the first to find the awful truth out. For a day and a half we were in that position; no sail came in sight, and we just sat waiting for death, we even prayed for it. About five in the afternoon the wind suddenly changed, and a fearful gale came on; the clouds, hitherto so quiet, now began to chase one another across the heavens, and the waves kept time with them. No boat could stand long in such a storm, for it was only just commencing, and we knew all hope was over. All at once one of the men called out 'A sail! a sail!' We all looked, but could see nothing,

and naturally thought the poor fellow was wandering. Not more than five minutes after a dreadfully high sea dashed over us, and capsized the boat. We were all struggling with the waves the next moment; some never rose, but I saw poor Herbert, he was quite close to me, he could not swim a yard. In fact, the only two who could out of that boat full was myself and a man named Pugh. I saw Grenville for an instant, and I tried to help him, but before my arm could reach him he sank to rise no more." There was a dimness over the black eyes and a pause, then he went on—"The boat was floating bottom upwards, and God in his great mercy let it drift near to me and Pugh. We were all but exhausted, when we managed to scramble on to it; the truth was we were to be saved. The sea now calmed a little, and we were enabled to retain our hold. We went riding along, now up now down, expecting each moment to be our last. How long we floated thus I don't know, but after

a bit a ship came in sight. She saw us and took us up. It was the sail the poor fellow had seen, no doubt, before the storm came on which kept her back. If she had only come up a little sooner we might all have been saved. I can tell nothing that happened after feeling myself lifted up on deck; I had not my senses for days. When I was able to ask questions or be spoken to, I found I was on board the 'Emeline Paul,' bound for the coast of Africa. The captain, whose name was Martin, was most kind to me. Pugh he took on his list, but I could do nothing. He gave me clothes, for I had not a rag but what I stood in, and my watch was ruined with the salt water. Captain Martin did all he could for me, and promised that if we fell in with a ship returning he would negotiate with the captain to take me. Pugh was perfectly satisfied, and having lost everything, did not care to return. As luck would have it we did meet a ship, and I was put on board and came straight

back. The 'Morning Star' arrived in dock on Tuesday night, and after calling at Keys to get some decent clothes, I came on here. And now you know my adventures. I want you to go to-morrow with me, and see Captain Watson, and when the 'Emeline Paul' comes back we must see Martin."

Tears were standing in Lord Hardwick's eyes when George finished his sorrowful tale. He could only grasp his young brother's hand again and again. But there was so much to be said.

"George, do you know what has fallen to my lot since you went away?"

"No; what is it?"

"I am now Lord Hardwick, and engaged to be married."

"Godwin, you don't mean it? So the old boy has hopped the long twig at last. Well, I am pleased for your sake; and to whom are you engaged?"

"May Drever."

"Good again; by Jove, you are in luck; I don't know a girl I should like better for a sister than May Drever. Then that accounts for you being so much there. When I found you were out, I asked where you were, and that trim little damsel said—'At Wild Wood, most likely.' And what changes have taken place since I left.?"

"A great many, especially at Wild Wood; they have had nothing but trouble, poor things."

And Godwin recorded the various trials and sorrows already known to you, reader. George listened to all attentively, and, at the last, asked, in a would-be careless tone—

"I suppose Miss Calvert is going to be married to the rising barrister, Julius Drever, Esq.?"

Something in the voice and manner caught Lord Hardwick's quick eye and ear, and he gazed long and earnestly at George before replying.

"No, Kate Calvert is not even engaged, let alone going to be married. She is not the same

girl lately, but I think I know the reason now; that accounts for her seeming so glad to talk about you. George, why did you not tell me this thing before you went away?"

There was a sign of wounded feeling in Lord Hardwick's voice, as he put this question. George did not just at once answer, and there was a strange quiver round the pliant mouth, and the black eyes studied the red coals attentively.

"To tell the truth, Godwin," said he, at last, "that affair all went wrong, and through that Miss Chuckels"—here followed a strong phrase which I shall not repeat. "She all but told me there was something between Kate Calvert and Julius Drever. She gave me to understand such was the case, and I, like a jealous, hot tempered fool, believed it. That wet night that I told you I had been to the Post, I had splashed my way down to the Grove, and saw Kate alone. I went with the full intention of asking her to have me, but somehow Julius Drever was named, and I

got angry at her manner, which I, of course, in my jealousy magnified into something. Anyway, I bade her good-bye, and came away. But never mind all that; I don't care to think about it; I see I was wrong, and a fool for my pains."

Godwin smiled.

"Then I suppose you will be setting it to rights soon, George?"

"Well, I think so; that is if Kate is agreeable. I shall sell out, Godwin, and settle down. I will take this cottage off your hands, if you like."

"I have not made up my mind to part with it yet, George. Hardwick Castle is a long way from here, and May is sure to want to see her family pretty often, so I thought I would keep this little box ready, and then we could run down whenever she wanted to."

"Oh! a capital idea that; well, I must find another if Kate will come and look after it for me."

"Try her, my boy; I don't think you will meet with much difficulty. But I am at a loss

how to introduce you to the neighbourhood, everyone believes you dead."

"Oh! they will find I am in the flesh, fast enough," replied George, laughing; "but I have one duty before me that I own to shrinking from, and that is seeing poor Grenville's father and mother. He was their only child, and a better fellow never breathed. I must go and tell them, because he named them so often during those two days and nights in that boat. He seemed to care such a lot for the old people. There was a certain little girl, too, who acted as companion to his mother—he loved her dearly. Her name is Ruth Turner; but I don't suppose his parents knew it, or there would have been a shindy. There never were such proud people as those Grenville's; they expected poor Herbert to marry a princess, or next door to it."

Far on into the night sat the brothers Hardwick talking. They seemed as if they could never cease; but nature at last asserted her rights, and they bade each other good-night.

CHAPTER XV.

The return of George Hardwick spread like wild-fire, as all such startling news will do. He was regarded with wonderment by the simple village folks, and even the persecuted waiters at the "Stork" were pleased to see the wild, but good-natured, liberal young officer. And as for George himself, he went about as giddy as ever, but those who had previously known him detected now and then a tinge of sadness in the mellow intonation of his voice. But it was not for long, it was only a passing shadow, and then he went about with a contented smile on his dark face, and his mouth was as full as ever of "My brother"—which brother, by the way, never was very far behind him. When you met George you might resonably expect to see Godwin within

five minutes. He seemed to consider his presence essential to show George to the public. Strangers took them for father and son, and it looked very like it, too. There was something more than brotherly in the way he spoke, while his placid countenance beamed again, of the "young lad" or "dear boy." And George was happy, and so was someone else, a certain little lady with rosy cheeks. She was as merry as a cricket all day long. Aye, thank God, her hour of sadness had gone by. It had been a dreadful shock to Kate when the news first spread that George Hardwick was back, because she had almost got accustomed to her sorrow. But they met one day, Godwin managed it, and all was explained. I am not going to tell you what they said or did; I am not allowed, and if I were not restricted I don't believe I could. Their meeting was too earnest, nay, I may say sacred, to chatter about. So I leave them one spring day, each with their heart at rest, and the rosy face pressed to the

dark one. It seemed as if every one was getting engaged, and Durill laughed, but not quite heartily, while he thought of it.

"And why don't you get engaged?" asked May.

It was very unfeeling of her, of course, and so Durill seemed to think, as he answered—

"So out of your great happiness you throw stones at me, May?"

"Ah! Durill, how very unjust of you; but you shall have a stone this time, and a big one, too. You men pride yourselves on your great foresight and penetration, especially in the love line. But you fall short, Durill, or you would have found something out long ago. Durill, do you know you are beloved?"

"Yes, by you, May."

"And by someone else, too. I feel sure you like her, because you once told me about some little person you kept in your heart. That little creature would be only too happy to be kept there if she knew it."

Durill was all attention.

"Pray don't treat me to riddles, I am a poor hand at them. Who is it, May?"

"Ruby. But I am betraying my trust, but I cannot help it. I see you are fretting that great big heart of yours to death about her, and she is crying and spoiling her eyes over you. What a silly fellow you are, Durill, and it is making you look quite old, I declare."

Up jumped the big man to look at himself in the glass, at which May laughed.

"Ah! you vain man."

He turned round smiling.

"No, I am not vain for myself, but for little Ruby. I should not like to offer her an ugly old man, she is such a child."

"Don't distress yourself, you are a great deal too handsome for her peace of mind as it is. She would have you if you had a wooden leg."

There was a tender, loving look in the lazy brown eyes that told too well how dear that little

girl was to the great fellow. May saw it, and asked in astonishment—

"Why have you not spoken, Durill?"

"Why, May, to tell the truth, I have had hard work to hide my love, but this trouble coming seemed to prevent me tying the child, because I did not know how we should come through it, and I would sooner cut my right hand off than blight the little soft kitten. Then again, I did not think it fair to hurry her; I am rather old, and as I said before, she is such a child. I wanted to be quite sure before I asked her; I wanted her to get the man she loved, whoever he was, and I bottled my own love up so that she might be free to choose. Then for another thing the night of the skating party, when I carried her home, I fancied she gave me rather the cold shoulder, and I began to wonder whether I had not been running after a shadow."

"And, Durill, could you give her up?"

The strong hands clenched themselves as he turned to May.

"Yes, I could have given her up, but I should have watched the fellow, and the very first time I had seen the little face sad, I should have broken his head. I could do anything for her happiness, no matter what I suffered myself."

"And would you have married, Durill?"

"No," thundered the deep voice, "No; she is my queen, I will have none other. There, May, love, don't ask me any more about it, you make me feel like a child."

Great tears were standing in the fine eyes. Do you think him less a man for it, reader? Don't. Durill Drever was a true man; a man whom a girl might freely trust herself to; a man whose word would be law because he ruled by love. He had a heart, a true loving heart, and little Ruby Calvert would be safe and happy in his keeping. But there were other things to be thought of than love, and though the big man loved, he might not tell his love just yet.

Things were looking if anything worse than ever, for there was a fearful dread afloat shrouded

in uncertainty, and nothing is worse than a danger which is felt and cannot be seen. It was almost wearing the life out of poor May, though she tried to bear up, and often cheered Durill.

The idea that Gilbert had stolen the will was a fixture in May's mind, and Durill and Julius were inclined to the same belief. Lord Hardwick was invaluable; he and Julius set inquiries on foot secretly, for not a breath of it was to get abroad. It was too awful, as Godwin said. But they were completely baffled, the trail led to the Isle of Wight, and there it stopped. He had gone from the Red Lion one morning early, his wife was not with him, he was alone. But nothing more could they glean. Gilbert Drever could not be found high or low, and the sharp detective scratched his head.

When Lord Hardwick returned after a day or two's stay in London, and reported the state of things to Durill and May there was a perplexed silence, at last broken by Durill, who exclaimed—

"What are we to do now? It seems he cannot be found; suppose we advertise?"

"No good, he would smell a rat at once; he knows he is discarded by his family, so he would suspect if you suddenly expressed a desire to see him. The best thing to do, in my opinion, is to keep Twist at work, and perhaps some day he may come across him. I confess I don't like him hiding; it looks as if your suspicion was correct, May?"

"Well, Godwin, I am convinced I am correct, unnatural and unlikely as it appears. And it is a sore trouble to me, God knows; but I should like to see things settled, and Durill here married, which he never can do so long as we all stay here. It is quite clear the will must be found."

"I agree with you, May, and here is another question. Do you think he saw Parker that night in the nursery?"

"No, I don't believe he did, and she took him for Crispin as it was, and actually shut the win-

dow after him. I cannot understand what she was about, but she thought to screen Cris, that is evident. And afterwards she did not like telling. Well, I suppose it was to be, and we are told when 'Night is darkest, dawn is nearest,' so perhaps it will prove in this instance."

"God grant it," said Durill, "for I am well nigh tired; and Judy is getting on the scent. She asked me only yesterday what on earth we three found to say to each other that we were closeted together so long. I thought if you only knew, poor girl, you would not wonder."

A few nights after Lord Hardwick's return from town, Durill suddenly found out that he had something very particular to say to him, so entering the drawing-room he said where he was going, and wickedly asked May whether she had any message.

"None," said May, "excepting that I wish George would come up oftener; he is always at the Grove, and one can't say a single word to him."

Madam laid aside her wool work, and smiling said—

"I wonder what Godwin will think of such a message, May, my love?"

"Nothing at all," replied May; "George is public property."

There was a general laugh at this, in which Durill, looking bigger than ever in a top coat, for the nights were chilly yet, joined.

"Well, I must be off; I shan't be long."

And away he went.

Now there was a near way to Felton Cottage, and that way Durill took. It lay through the Druid's Grove, and along a narrow path into the road. It cut off the greater part of the park, and was frequently used to reach the station when time pressed. Down this narrow pathway Durill went. The old trees met overhead, on one side there was a thickly wooded embankment, and the other was a decided drop, almost an immense depth full of fine trees, on the tops of which

those in the Druid's Grove gazed. It was a lonely place, but Durill was no chicken-hearted man. So he marched along smoking, and as a natural consequence ruminating on the entanglement of their affairs. In the midst of his reflections he found himself close upon a man who was coming up the Grove towards the house. The face was almost concealed under a broad flapped hat, while the rest of the body was huddled in a cloak and muffler. Both had been in deep thought evidently, for neither was aware of the presence of the other till they almost bumped together. There was a dead stop on the narrow path, and Durill peered into the stranger's face.

"Who are you?" asked the Squire; "This is not a public footpath, and leads nowhere but to Wild Wood."

There was no answer, but a twitching of the right arm and hand. Durill again repeated his question—"Who are you?" and stretched out his hand as if he would see for himself. But the

figure was too quick, with one bound he was up the embankment and crushing his way through the brushwood. Durill stood aghast a second, and then walked on, it was useless for him with his great body, attempting to follow; the stranger had the start, and, no doubt, would cut across the fields at the top. One thing presented itself clearly to Durill, and that was, that the man, whoever he was was no stranger; if he had made a jump to the right, he would have been killed by the fall and the trees, but he seemed well acquainted with the place. Then arose another point, who could want to prevent Durill from seeing his face? Not one of the servants' friends or beaux, for the young squire was a general favourite by reason of his kindness to everyone. Then it certainly was none of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, because he was on excellent terms with them all. There was only one person that was likely to avoid Durill and hide himself, and that was Gilbert.

Yes, it must certainly have been Gilbert, and as Durill thought of it, he called himself a fool for allowing him to escape. He might have caught him standing there in the narrow path, but it did not strike him that it was the identical man they were looking for, meanwhile he got away. Durill stamped again, and having by this time reached Felton Cottage, he gave such a knock at the door that the housekeeper almost fainted after sending the maid to open it. Lord Hardwick was in and alone. George was, as usual, at the "Grove."

"Why, what *is* to do, Durill, you look ready to eat somebody."

"And well I may; would you believe it, Godwin, I have actually let Gilbert pass, or rather get away from me in the 'Druid's Grove.'"

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, but I do. I met him face to face, but I did not recognise him, he was so disguised, but no sooner did I attempt to take hold of him than

he bounced off. What on all the earth he is doing, dodging round there, I cannot imagine."

"Umph!" grunted Lord Hardwick, "depend upon it he has some object in view. Do you think it is to see anyone in the house?"

"I cannot say; I am sure one thing is quite certain, he does not want to see *me*."

Lord Hardwick smiled.

"Not likely. I should keep watch, I think, Durill, it would be no harm, and as May says, no good will be done till that will is found, and the only way to find whether Gilbert has it is to catch him, and then make him talk as Julius did Crispin."

"Aye, there's the rub, 'catch him,' he is rather a slippery customer, Godwin, or he would have been trapped before now, for I am sure we have taken enough trouble."

"Yes, that is what Twist says. How he has managed to elude the detectives is a mystery to me. But there is one advantage to him and a

disadvantage to us, Twist named it to Julius, and that is, being obliged to work in secret. Not a breath of it must get abroad, therefore they dare not set the search thoroughly on foot throughout England, and they may go on groping almost in darkness for another month or two. Indeed, my opinion is they will never find him unless some chance blows him across their path. His face though very good looking is rather common, I mean there are plenty of the same class of men, there is nothing peculiar about it. When I showed his photograph to Twist, he said he would rather have had him anything than what he was, because there are so many of that sort."

"Confound it all," said Durill, "if I had only nabbed the fellow all the hunting would have been at an end, but he was gone like a shot."

Durill sat talking some time, and then took his leave after being earnestly advised by Lord Hardwick to "keep his weather eye open,"

which he did but to no purpose, he neither saw nor heard anything.

It was not without a little mortification that he recounted his adventure to May, and she seemed if anything more concerned than himself.

"I am not easy in my mind," Durill. "I don't like Gilbert prowling about; recollect you have quarrelled with him, and some men never rest till they resent their injuries, whether real or imaginary."

Durill laughed at May's face.

"Don't get terrified on my account, my dear; I am a match for three such as Gilbert if it came to the push."

CHAPTER XVI.

The current of affairs received a sudden turn about this time at Wild Wood, and the one to cause the commotion was Madam. One evening at dinner Madam was observed to turn very white, and the next instant she was senseless. They carried her out, and tried the customary restoratives, but all to no purpose, Madam Drever remained as lifeless as a corpse. Then an awful fear stole over everyone—supposing she never came too, but slipped into the next world without a sound? Lois shrieked loud in her terror, and no one could quiet her, but it did not reach her mother's ears, she lay stiff and numb, with a bluish tinge on her delicate face. Dr. Tinley and Mark were sent for post haste, and Madam

was carried upstairs. But after a while life returned, at first in gasps, and afterwards a violent fit of tears. May ran out to see Durill, who was walking the corridor in terrible suspense, with his arms crossed over his broad chest, and his head lowered.

"Thank God! thank God!" was all he could say; poor fellow, they had had so much sorrow of late it had unhinged even him.

The danger was over, and Durill and May went down stairs to wait the doctor's arrival—they could not be very long now. Hark! there are wheels, and May going into the hall, meets old Dr. Tinley, a broad Scotchman.

"Weel, Miss May, and what's the matter now?"

"It is mamma, Dr. Tinley, she is not well, and has given us all an awful fright; however, she is better now, I am glad to say, and here's Judy ready to pilot you upstairs."

"It is only Dr. Tinley," said May, returning

to Durill. "I suppose Mark was out and will come presently."

Shortly there was another ring, followed by voices, amongst which could be heard that of old Blake, exclaiming—

"The Lord save us, Mr. Calvert."

Durill and May rose in astonishment, and at the same instant the door was opened, and in came Mark and Lord Hardwick, followed by Blake, who was literally shaking like an aspen leaf. Lord Hardwick and Mark were both as white as death. Before either of them could answer the looks of bewilderment visible on both May's and Durill's face, old Blake ejaculated—

"Mr. Durill, sir, for heaven's sake listen; here's Lord Hardwick been shot at coming up the avenue."

Durill's lips parted—

"Impossible! Shot at?"

"Yes, indeed, Durill, it is perfectly correct. I was deliberately shot at half way up the slope, by a man in a slouched hat. But I am none the

worse, thank God," said Godwin, glancing at May, who was holding to the table, poor girl.

Mark wiped his hot face.

"Of all the narrow escapes I have heard of this is the narrowest. Look here," said he, taking hold of Lord Hardwick's hat, which was a high-crowned one. "See this; the bullet went clean through the crown, not an inch off his head. One bit lower and you would have been a dead man, Hardwick. Gad! it makes me turn cold. Who the deuce could it have been?"

There was a pause, then Lord Hardwick said—

"I believe it was a case of mistaken identity, Calvert. I was mistaken for Durill here; we are both pretty much of a size, and seeing me with you no doubt the villain thought he had the right man. You were right the other night, Durill, about what you saw. My eyes are good, and I saw plainly who it was."

May's face was perfectly death-like as she put her hand on Durill's arm.

"Durill, something must be done, and at once

or there will be murder committed. Mark, did you see the man's face?"

"Not I, May. I saw nothing but a fellow in a big hat pop from behind some tree and fire a pistol straight at Hardwick's head. He never waited to see the result of his shot; he bolted. But who is it you suspect? because he must be secured, for depend upon it he will have another try."

No one appeared wishful to answer Mark's question, and Blake, who stood at the door, waited breathlessly.

"Well," said Durill, at last, "we are all to be trusted, and can keep our tongues still. It is my own brother Gilbert. I fancied I saw him a night or two ago in the Grove, but he was too quick for me, and no doubt he is bent upon paying me off for the horsewhipping I gave him. May warned me of this when I told her I had seen him, but I had no idea he would try to shoot me."

There was a horrfied silence for some time, which was broken by Blake.

"For the Lord's sake, Mr. Durill, have him caught. If you or any one else got killed what would be done, and Madam ill too?"

"You are right, Blake," replied Mark; "we are none of us safe; that is, we men, after dark. He must be insane, Durill."

"I am afraid not, Mark; he has a good idea what he is after. Any way it is not my affair any longer since he has shot at you, Godwin, so you can do what you like."

"Very good, Durill; then I shall, and at once, too. I am not going to be shot at myself nor allow you. I can stand anything fair, but none of your sly tricks, thank you. I'll have a tussle before I die, not be killed like a dog."

Lord Hardwick was as good as his word; by the early morning a telegram was on its way to Julius and Twist, and the afternoon train saw them at Maldon. The object was to capture Gilbert;

they reasonably expected he would appear at night again, and they intended to set a watch. They still strove to hide it from the knowledge of the world. Reader, don't think this an impossibility; there are plenty of family troubles settled without the aid of the law. Julius was dreadfully upset, and well he might be, but Twist sniffed his pug-nose higher up than ever, and informed the terror-struck group that it was not the first case of the sort he had been called in to, and there was nothing for it but to nab the gentleman.

Twist then proceeded to make a circumlocution of Maldon and the neighbourhood, and returned with the intelligence that Gilbert was not about, but he might be hiding somewhere. Which no one believed, as there was no one in Maldon likely to screen him; therefore, he either walked a great distance or came by one of the late trains.

What a house it was that 30th of May—everyone secretly shaking with dread.

Judy and Lois were kept in the dark, and Madam was still in bed. Blake invented lies by the dozen to account for the appearance of Twist, and introduced him in the servants' hall as "My cousin."

Julius said he had come to see his mother. May wandered about, never letting Durill or Godwin out of her sight after dark alone.

It was arranged that the watch should commence at half-past nine: it consisted of five—Durill, Lord Hardwick, George, Twist, and Julius. Blake and May were to be on the watch inside, and open the side door at once. A little after half-past they went out, and May sat down to wait. Blake came in from time to time to say a word or two, and also Judy, but Blake generally contrived to get her away to Madam's room by saying he heard her bell ring, or some other white lie.

And Judy went at once; for although she did not get on too well with her mother, she tried hard to do her duty.

Ten o'clock struck—half-past—and then eleven. May sat on; her heart thumping, trying to be brave; Blake came in to see to the fire.

"I do wish we were well through this night, Miss May; I am all of a flutter—I don't know what has come to me. They are all mostly a bed; Madam's sleeping draught came an hour ago, and then the young ladies went to bed. Are you afraid to be here alone, Miss May?"

"No, Blake, not at all. Hark! is not that someone at the door?"

May was right—there was a gentle tap at the door and then at the window, the sign agreed upon by the watchers. Blake and May went. There stood George Hardwick.

"What is it, George?"

"Nothing as yet, May, only Godwin thought you might be uneasy, and as my post is near here, I said I would see to you now and then."

"Thanks. Have you seen anyone?"

"Yes; Twist sighted a figure crossing the footpath, but they are not up here yet, and now I must go."

Blake shut the door to, and May returned to her chair by the fire.

"Blake, don't go; sit down here," called May, "because when they come you may be wanted, and the less noise the better."

The old man did so; and while they are sitting, watching, and waiting before the fire, let us take a peep at the five other watchers.

They had stationed themselves according to Twist's directions. George Hardwick kept guard by the front door, so that no one could appear on the slope without being seen. Julius at the other side, to prevent a surprise from the fields and woods at that end, and Twist, Durill, and Godwin guarded the "Druid's Grove" and the footpath. Fortune favoured them; it was a perfectly fine light night—the moon was just at its full. Just such a night as the one the

Brothers Hardwick met. It was a long time to wait, and Godwin whispered to Durill—

"Perhaps he won't come to-night, unless he found he had not succeeded last night."

"Perhaps not. I sha'n't stay here much longer, that's certain. Why, here's Twist coming—what's up, I wonder?"

Godwin and Durill were standing amongst the trees at the top of the Grove, and Twist was keeping watch at the bottom.

"Hush!" said Lord Hardwick, peeping out; "it's not Twist, it's Gilbert. How, in heaven's name, has he got past?"

Yes, Godwin was perfectly correct—it was Gilbert. The moon shone full upon him, and showed the same broad hat noticed by both Durill and Godwin. He came walking quietly along, and after him another figure—Twist. The wily detective had let him pass so as to have him between two fires. When he reached the "Druid's Tree" he went close up to the trunk

and stood. He was effectually screened from Lord Hardwick and Durill by reason of its thickness.

"What can he be about," exclaimed Durill, under his breath, "never, surely, saying his prayers like the monks of old?"

Perhaps three minutes he remained at the tree, then continued his way to the house.

Twist was now observed to make frantic gestures, flapping his arms together.

"Now's our time," said Godwin, and he immediately gave a shrill whistle to bring George and Julius.

At the sound Gilbert stopped, but it was too late—they were upon him. He did not forget to fire his pistol—at random, luckily—and then took the only chance of escape. There was only one side free, and that was the right side, down the depth.

That course he took without any hesitation. He gave one mad leap, and they heard him crushing down into the woods below.

"My God!" shouted Durill, "he is a dead man."

It was the deepest part, so if he was not killed he would certainly be seriously injured.

They all with one accord ran round and commenced a search, which, after a short time, proved successful.

They found Gilbert a mangled, bruised, senseless form, lying under the trees. His face and hands were fearfully lacerated with the brambles, and the blood flowed freely. They picked him up, and carried him to the house nearest at hand—Wild Wood. It was a dreadful thing.

Blake groaned aloud as he helped to put him on the library sofa, but there was no sound from the injured man. George had run for Mark, and now there was nothing to do but sponge away the blood and try to restore him to consciousness. The household was asleep with the exception of those in the library, and May now made Blake go and arouse Mrs. Morrison to prepare a bed. Barely

had he gone before the door opened and Judy glided in like a ghost.

"What is to do? What was the firing about?"

They made no reply, only moved back and allowed her to see the man on the couch. May had sponged away the dirt and blood, and poor Judy recognised her once idolised brother Gilbert. She gave no scream, she quietly slipped on her knees by the couch and buried her face. But she must not remain there, so Julius kindly moved her. All this time Durill had been fighting to get some brandy between the clenched teeth, and now succeeded. After a couple of spoonsful there was a quiver of the eyelids and a movement of the mouth. The eyes opened, and he gazed at each by turns. Then he made an effort to speak, which Durill tried to check, but Twist, who had an eye to business, interposed.

"Nay, nay, sir; just you let him speak while he can."

Twist was right, but it was little he could say; it was but a spark of life the brandy had recalled. He made an effort to articulate, but the words were feeble and disjointed.

"My mother—forgive—the will I have—"

A look of exultation flitted across the drawn face, and the head fell heavily back.

Gilbert Benton Drever was dead.

The entrance of Mark stopped the exclamation that rose to the detective's lips, but his face expressed his feelings instead.

CHAPTER XVII.

Reader, with your permission, I shall take a stride. I don't care to tell of the inquest, the lamentations, the shame, and grief at Wild Wood. It is long since now, and partly forgotten, so let it rest.

The violent tempest of grief over, and then came stern necessities. Twist was extremely disgusted that Gilbert should have died and told nothing satisfactory, but there was someone in life who had something to say, and that was staid, grave Judy. She made the confession herself in her sore repentance and sorrow.

"Durill, I have been to blame more than any of you think. I helped Gilbert when I had no right to; it was wicked of me, but he frightened

me so, and I thought it best to keep peace. He used to come here many a night and wait for me. Crispin was right about seeing me in the 'Grove' that night, only he took him for Norton. I gave him all my money and my necklace that there was all that fuss about, and for which I had to tell so many lies. He used to come down by the late train and go back by the quarter past eleven. My life was perfectly wretched, and I dared not tell, I was too big a coward. I see now how I erred, and I am truly sorry."

"And did you know he had the will, Judy?"

"No, Durill, ah no, I had no idea; but he might get it easy enough, because he was always dodging about, and the side door was open. I often wondered how it was none of you ever met him, and I used to sit in misery many and many a night."

"Well, that is to be accounted for; he and Crispin were so alike that when he shaved off his moustache one might easily be taken for the other

at night. And this explains the mystery of Crispin's ghost that terrified Parker so; it was Gilbert all the while. The—well, I won't be severe now he is dead and gone, and I trust now we may have peace."

"So do I," said Julius, "but how about the will? Twist laments enough over it, and it is provoking, for now we shall never find it."

But Julius was mistaken. There is a small hand which sometimes steals round and alters the position of things. That little hand was at work now.

One morning, about a week after Gilbert had been interred, Twist, the detective, appeared and requested to see the Squire. Now the Squire happened to be ruminating, and sat with his massive head pillowed on the back of the chair. May sat opposite, and Judy sat near with a note in her hand. It was from Lois. She and Madam were at Buxton. The Hall was undergoing a regular cleaning, and its inmates were resting

themselves. There was a listlessness about them all, and Durill declared that neither May nor Judy should do a scrap of work. Consequently the mornings were passed in peaceful quiet, and the afternoons pretty much after the same fashion.

Ivo also was at liberty; indeed, he had never been restricted since the fatal whipping; he had never quite recovered either his health or spirits.

"So they are all right and comfortable, Judy?"

"So it seems, Durill; Lois says mamma is considerably better, and Buxton is very cheerful, so I conclude they are both enjoying themselves as well as can be expected."

"No doubt; and I am glad of it; perhaps Lois may find a partner there—some fascinating fop."

May smiled, and put aside her book.

"I trust not, indeed; I should wish Lois to marry a sensible man, who could keep her in check, poor girl."

"Just so, May, but—"

Here Twist's arrival was made known by Blake.

"Well, show him in here," replied Durill.

The detective entered and seated himself, at Durill's request. May wondered what he had come for, and her curiosity was speedily satisfied.

"Has anything been heard of the missing will, sir?"

"No, nothing, Twist; in fact, we have all given it up as lost."

"Well, sir, it is more than I have; I don't know when anything bothered me so; I have searched all the departed gentleman's haunts, but there is no trace of it, and his wife is evidently innocent. I have taken the liberty of keeping an eye upon her, Mr. Drever. But something tells me that will will be found. You see, sir, they rarely destroy these sort of documents; there appears to be some charm in keeping them, and kept they invariably are till

it gets too hot. Now, Mr. Gilbert could not have been put to the push, because he never knew we were after him, and when he found it out the end came. So I am inclined to believe that will still exists. Now I have given the case great consideration, sir, and I want your permission to search the Druid's Grove. I remember a curious thing your brother did, he stood close to the Druid's tree—that great yew there is. At the time I believed him to be watching you and Lord Hardwick, and that was why I followed him up so quickly. But it afterwards came out that he could not see either of you, therefore he must have stopped at that tree for some particular purpose. And with your permission I will examine that tree."

"You have my full permission to do what you like, Twist, though I don't expect it will avail anything. Stay, I will go with you myself. And do you come May and Judy; the fresh air will do you good."

May and Judy assented, and, after getting their hats, followed Durill and Twist to the Grove.

The detective's small eyes peeped every where, and he proceeded to knock the massive trunk all round. Judy elevated her eyebrows, but she need not have done it. At the off side, from where jutted a mighty limb, in itself a tree, he paused, and a smile crossed his face. Then, stretching up his hand, he began to feel the surface carefully, and presently arrived at a hole which, by reason of its darkness, appeared like a knot. But Enoch Twist was a 'cute and clever man—one of Scotland Yard's oldest hands. Durill and his sisters were watching with bated breath; they saw now what he was after. The hole was deep; it took all his arm to reach the bottom, standing on tiptoe. But his pains were rewarded—when he withdrew his hand it grasped something, a soft, dark fur thing, which, upon inspection, proved to be a sealskin cap.

Twist made a table of one of his knees, and cautiously opened it, the others bent over him. Yes, there was a roll of parchment, and the very papers wanted.

In a squirrel's hole in the ancient yew tree, round which so many had said their prayers in years gone bye, was found the lost will. It was a joyful, yet sorrowful finding. Whether Gilbert had put it there the night he stole it, and got through the nursery window, or the night he met his death, was a matter of doubt. But Twist believed it had been there all the time, and that accounted for Gilbert haunting the place; he could not keep away, he must feel if his treasure was safe.

There was a general rejoicing, and once again Mr. Payne was called upon to read the long lost will to the assembled family.

It was precisely as Durill and May had stated; Gilbert had had his share, and considerably more —the papers were shown to prove it. That, no

doubt, was his reason for taking it, but it had not done him any good, as you have already seen.

Tears stood in the eyes of May as the old lawyer held out his hand to Madam, and in a few well chosen words wished them all many years of happiness now the will was found. Things had righted themselves, and surely there would be joy after so much trouble, sunshine after so much rain. But the shadows so long over Wild Wood were difficult to dispel, and one of the first gleams of sunshine that crept in was Durill's love. It came one hot June day like a bird with a beautiful song. I don't know that I can sing it, but I can try.

Ruby came up to see May one morning, and Durill was there; so after a bit May left the room on some not very clear errand. It was thoughtless of May, how could she expect Durill to look at the pretty picture unmoved, he was not adamant? Such a sweet picture it was too, that pretty, plump, breathing little girl in her neat

print dress. She leant half out of the window playing with the roses, and the wind kissing the pale cheeks. Durill watched for some time, but then he got jealous of the wind that never seemed satisfied. He could not sit and worship afar off any longer, he thought how much nicer it would be to have his arms round that warm little figure and hold her quite close. So he went to the window and stood looking down at the pretty girl, with his arms folded across his broad chest. There was profound silence for a few seconds. Then the deep voice said one word "Ruby," and she, hearing her master's call, went to the arms held out to her. What need of words? what need of gestures when each felt the need of the other to make life perfect?

Their wooing was not of their own making, it was part of their being, their existence. Their lots were cast together.

> "As unto the bow the cord is,
> So unto the man is woman;
> Though she bends him, she obeys him,
> Though she draws him, yet she follows,
> Useless each without the other."

"What are you trembling for, Ruby?"

"Because I am so happy, Durill."

"Silly child," said the big man, holding her tighter.

"Durill, you hurt me."

"Poor thing!" said he, laughing. "There, is that better? And what does my little dove say to find this great vulture in her nest, disturbing her peace of mind. A child like you, you ought to be playing 'battle door and shuttle cock.' Don't you think it is all a mistake; what should I do with a baby like you trotting after me through life?"

The baby reached up on tip-toe, and pushed the brown curls further off the white brow before she replied—

"Be kind to her, and when you are old she will be young and able to repay you?"

"Ruby, don't you think it is a great risk to take an elderly bachelor like me, who may have had nothing to do all these years but cultivate my vices?"

"I am not afraid, but if you really think there is great danger, I won't have you. Will you please put me down, Mr. Drever?"

"No."

"Will you let me go?"

"No."

"And why won't you? somebody will be coming in."

"What do I care if all the world comes, you little witch. Child, to part with you would be like parting with my heart; don't tear yourself away from me, my darling, or I shall surely die. Do you recollect the night I carried you home from the 'Glen?' it was a wonder I ever put you out of my arms, I felt very like bolting with you once or twice. But you were cold to me that night, little one."

"Oh! Durill, I was so miserable that night, it was not the pain of my foot that made me cry; I cried because I saw you walking with someone, and you called her 'My dear.' I sprained my foot standing on the sticks to look at you."

The great fellow looked awfully pleased, but he kept it to himself; some men are exacting with their love, and I rather fancy the Squire was.

"I wonder whose eyes are glittering? I had no idea you were such a vixen, Ruby. But I won't venture to aggravate you further—the somebody I was walking with was May, she needed comforting. So now draw in your claws, my pet, and give me a long, long kiss. I sha'n't kiss you, you are to kiss me."

Ruby did his bidding; she reached up, and stretching out her two short plump arms, put them round the big man's neck, and pressed her lips to his.

"My darling, my darling, no one shall take you from me, now or ever, my pretty queen."

The door opened, in came May. Ruby's first impulse was to dart away, but Durill held her fast with one arm, while he stretched out the other hand to his sister.

"May, come and see my queen, I have found her at last."

May kissed the blushing Ruby, and told them it was the wish of her heart to see them united.

"You two will be as happy as Godwin and I, and it is best to be settled in life. What will your mamma say, Ruby?"

Ruby made no reply, but Durill did.

"The old lady is sure to make some objection, and predict some misfortune, her foresight is wonderful. But we will surmount everything she can bring forward, and the future we will leave to God."

"Well said, Durill," replied May, gently, "we shall be beginning a new life soon, but, under Our Father's guidance, we shall not stray."

CHAPTER XVIII.

One bright morning in July, a year after Gilbert's death, and the finding of the will, the village of Maldon was a scene of gaiety. Arches crossed the road, and flags floated from every window. It was a general holiday—and why? because it was the Squire's wedding day. The cloud had passed, and now the sun shone brightly on this their wedding-day, as we hope it may shine through life. There had been sore trials and afflictions, but God deals justly, my friends. At last right conquered wrong, and peace reigned. Changes had taken place during the last year. Mill Bank was inhabited by Madam Drever, Judy, and Lois; the last-named lady being still disengaged, for though she had "fished for many, she had as yet hooked none." Crispin

was still abroad, but married to a rich native girl, whose money he was speedily converting into ducks and drakes. And what had become of Mrs. Gilbert? At her husband's death she retired into the bosom of her doting family, and when next she emerged from it, it was as the wife of a young Scotchman, named Low.

Hark! there are the bells. Everyone is on the watch for the happy couples, for it is a triple wedding this sunny July day that is being held in that solemn old church. There's the village band arranged in great force at the pretty white gates, playing "Haste to the wedding," and everyone is hastening.

There is a hush, followed by a murmur of delight, as the carriages draw up with the three bonny brides—Kate, Ruby, and May. There they are, smiling, at the altar, with the hot sun pouring through the windows, and the swallows skimming over the pews, uttering their little shrill cry. Their relations and friends stand

behind. There's Mrs. Calvert, Mark, Minnie, Madam, Judy, Lois, and Julius, holding little pale Ivo by the hand, who is nearly heart-broken at parting from Aunt May, though only for a few weeks, for he is to go to her directly they are installed in Hardwick Castle.

It is a pretty sight, and well each couple looks. There's Lord Hardwick and May, each calmly grave and stately; George, with his dark beauty and his pretty rosy Kate; and, lastly, great Durill, with his cheery face, and little Ruby, with her eyes wide open clinging to his arm. They rise now, and stand for a second in the sweet old church.

There is a stillness, and during that stillness, something rises above them, and fixes itself directly over their heads. It is a vapour which no one sees. But you and I know what it is, reader; it is angels' wings, for God has given His angels charge over them.

* * * * *

Again, through the mist of a year and six months, we catch another glimpse of Maldon. Things are pretty much the same, except that there is now no Dr. Tinley; Mark Calvert has the entire practice.

Mrs. Calvert is in rather a better frame of bodily and mental health, the first of which she attributes to "Brandreth's pills and Alcock's plasters;" the last is owing to the loss of both daughters. Now that she has a companion, amiable as those ladies generally are, Mrs. Calvert has discovered that there is a limit to their patience; so she has to think a trifle more about other people's feelings, and less of her own.

And these daughters? They are extremely happy. Kate resides in Doctor Tinley's house; Ruby makes a capital squire's lady, and whenever there is a baby at the cottage she visits she gets possession of the little thing, and warms its toes at the fire. The truth is, she has a baby of her

own, a fat little lad called John Durill, whom his papa tosses about, and teaches to box mamma.

And now my pen says it is tired, and must stop. It is autumn, and the golden brown leaves are rustling through the woods. The birds have nearly all gone, the sweet nightingale warbled last one moonlight night a month ago, and everything is so still, for it is "the evening of the year."

Supposing it is our evening, reader, yours and mine; supposing we never again feel the sun's heat, or see the ripe fruit hanging on the boughs; supposing that we are next summoned to appear at the "Golden Gate!"

I would ask you just one question before we part. Have you got the key? Will it be to you the Lord will say—

"WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT?"

THE END.

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